

KHAKI
FREEMAN TILDEN

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KHAKI



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KHAKI

HOW TREDICK GOT INTO
THE WAR

BY
FREEMAN TILDEN



FRONTISPIECE BY
J. HENRY

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*To all those, in camp and field, on sea and land,
in the mines and factories, at the forge
and plow —*

*To all those who toil with hand and brain,
truly serving —*

*And to those whose fate it is to “only stand
and wait” —*

*Wearers of KHAKE all — upon the flesh or
in the heart —*

This book.

KHAKI

I

IN Tredick there was a man who admitted that he was a coward.

This is unusual. It is so unusual that you will immediately want to know where Tredick is. And so I reply that Tredick lies between the seventieth and one hundred and twenty-fifth degrees of longitude, West; and that, in a general way, it is south of Canada and north of Mexico. I will further state, to make identification a little easier, that Tredick is represented on the maps by a small round black dot; that it has three churches, twenty-odd stores, several flourishing industries and a Carnegie Library; that the main street is called Main Street, and the street that leads off Main Street to the railroad station is called Railroad Street; that the hotel is called the Commercial Hotel; and that there is a square, or a "common," in the business center, with a granite shaft dedicated to the town's men who fell during the Civil War.

But in case I have not been specific enough in this indication, I might add that Tredick was settled some hundreds of years ago by people who came to the New World from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales; that these people forged, by blood and muscle, a new freedom which they had several times to defend, also with blood and muscle; and that in the month of March of the year 1917 these people were enjoying peace — a peace which their ancestors had fought as the very devil to achieve.

So now you know where Tredick is. And if it

should happen that *you* live in Tredick, and you should discover anything, in the narrative which follows, that seems to reflect upon the integrity or character of Tredick, I ask you to bear in mind that I, the writer, likewise live in Tredick — that your common is my common, your church may be my church, the store you trade at may very well be the store I trade at, and, for all you know, I may be Tom Gilstar, the man who admitted that he was a coward. Or I may be Sherry Gilstar, his brother; or I may be Matt Pillicy, or Deacon Bradshaw, or Henry Hobgood, or Sam Greenberg, or Miss Prudence Perkins, or Professor Wenham, or some one other of the two thousand persons who live in what the editor of the Tredick *Enterprise* calls, justly enough, "our beautiful town."

I aim first to take you back to town meeting day, in March, 1917, when Tom Gilstar, the man who admitted that he was a coward, was elected constable of Tredick. You know as well as I do that the town officers who were that day elected in the Town Hall, had in fact been elected several evenings before in the sitting room of Deacon Bradshaw, the last house on the left hand side of Valley street, going North. You know that the Deacon, and Wells Hardy, and Harry Upton, and Fred Payne, made up their "slate," and carried it through without a yip from anybody except Tobe Willis, the town drunkard, who voted "No" on everything, just out of cussedness, and was finally led home by a supporting committee of two.

But what perhaps you don't know, is a little conversation that went on, at the Deacon's, concerning the august position of Constable, and the fitness of the candidate.

Fred Payne asked, "What about Constable, Deacon? Fiske says he won't take the job again. He's too busy with other things."

The Deacon said, "I had Tom Gilstar in mind. He'd do."

"Gilstar!" shouted two or three of the men at once. "Are you joking, Deacon?"

"I don't joke," replied the Deacon, with severity. "What's the matter with Tom Gilstar?"

"He hasn't got the sand of a jack rabbit," said somebody.

"Why, that big booby is afraid of his own shadow. You know it yourself," somebody else said, addressing the deacon.

"Tom isn't what you'd call courageous, probably," replied Deacon Bradshaw. "But look at him. He's a great big strapping fellow. He's as strong as an ox. And he's as good a boy as ever lived. He's deserving."

"I'll admit he's deserving. I like Tom, myself," said Wells Hardy, proprietor of the Tredick Cash Market. "But let's give him some other job, and have a constable with nerve enough to fight, if it was necessary, to protect our lives and property."

Deacon Bradshaw permitted himself the gayety of a somber smile. He gazed upon Wells Hardy with the tolerant quizzicality of a parent toward the rash enthusiasm of youth. "Wells," he said, "you know as well as I do that nothing ever happens in Tredick. Once in a while Tobe Willis has to be put in the cooler. Sometimes a tramp straggles through here. Occasionally, I'm sorry to say, one of our folks evades the dog-tax. What else is there?"

"Then why have any constable?" ventured Wells Hardy.

"There must be a constable. We've always had a constable," was the reply which settled the matter. "So I figure it out this way: Tom Gilstar is big and strong. He looks, at least in size, like a regular tough

customer. You and I and the rest of the home folks may know he's chicken-hearted — but strangers don't know it, and it's strangers he's to frighten, not us. Tom will do well enough."

"I guess the deacon's right, as he most always is," said Fred Payne. "Write him down, deacon."

From the town hall, on election day, Deacon Bradshaw went straight to the home of Tom Gilstar. He swung his gold-headed cane, and walked with the mien, albeit a little wavering in the joints, of a man who had helped make destiny, even the small corner of destiny represented by Tredick. When he approached the gate that opened into the Gilstar front yard, his sharp gray eyes first appraised the house and its surroundings. Then he looked up and down the street, as should a cautious general, to make sure of his "terrain." Then, suddenly, he cocked his head on one side, and stood listening. He could hear a phonograph, playing within. A disdainful ghost-smile came on the deacon's mouth. To the deacon all phonographs were sentimental, and the deacon despised the sentimental.

Evidently, some one else despised the sentimental, too. As Deacon Bradshaw entered the kitchen, without the formality of knocking, he heard a shrill, acid voice say, in the sitting room: "Do stop that horrible thing, Phœbe! I simply can't stand that tune. It's nauseating!"

"—— Silver Threads Among the Gol-l-ld," the phonograph was about to repeat, lugubriously, when "Phœbe" must have obligingly switched off the machine, and it ended:

"—— among the G-rrrrrrr — ug!" and lapsed into silence.

A sweet, patient voice said, "Don't you like that tune, Prudence?"

"No, I don't. You know I don't," was the sharp answer.

"I like it," went on the other voice, with that queer, innocent stubbornness of the pure-in-heart.

"I agree with Prudence — it's trashy nonsense!" exclaimed the deacon, dramatically, with a double knock on the half-open sitting room door. He entered, hat in hand.

Phœbe Gilstar, Tom Gilstar's mother, was sitting in a rocking chair, at the side of the table whereon rested the offending music machine. On the other side of the table, with her hat on, and a few small parcels in her hands, sat a young woman who, at the deacon's entrance, flashed a glance at him, and then lowered her eyes shyly. Queerly enough, the young woman had the same delicate profile, with the same tenderly sensitive mouth, as Mrs. Gilstar, though she was of another family — another race, indeed. She was the daughter of Matt Pillicy, the French-Canadian who kept the livery in Tredick. Her name was Antonia.

The other woman, Miss Prudence Perkins, stood in the doorway that led upstairs. There were heavy curtains over this doorway, and evidently Miss Prudence had just come down (perhaps to still the phonograph) as the deacon entered.

Miss Perkins had none of the tenderness displayed in her face, that characterized her sister, Mrs. Gilstar. Her mouth was a straight line. Once in a while her lips parted in something like a wireless flash of humor, and her eyes, which saw through everything, and bored their gray way into your very innermost reactions, when she looked at you, were not a bit unkindly. But they were defensively edged, like well-kept tools. Her tawny hair was untouched with white, though she was older than Phœbe by two years.

And she frizzled it into chaste curlettes, upon her forehead, in defiance of modern methods of coiffure. Also, in contempt of Time, she scorned the black silk and white lace of her sister, and indulged in a boisterous light blue gown, with a touch of Indian-corn in it here and there.

She was looking straight at Deacon Bradshaw, now; and that dignified individual, whose own eyes commonly made the lightminded quail, perceptibly dropped to the stature of an ordinary mortal.

"How d'ye do," greeted the deacon, nodding to Mrs. Gilstar and Miss Antonia. "How d'ye do, Prudence."

Mrs. Gilstar had risen quickly, and her hand was upon the deacon's hat, and her invitation was toward a chair. Miss Antonia replied in a clear, modest voice. But Miss Prudence Perkins answered crisply, "How-dye do, Charles. I didn't hear you knock, outside."

Deacon Bradshaw hadn't knocked, outside. Miss Perkins knew he hadn't. The deacon showed two red spots just above his white beard, and hastened to say, "I've got news for you. Phœbe, your son Tom is elected constable."

"Constable!" Mrs. Gilstar breathed it out in genuine amazement.

"Yes. Town meeting is just over. I came over because I thought — you'd like to know from the proper source. I — er — may say I had something to do with his getting the place. Tom is a good boy. The place is a good place. A sinecure, you might say. The salary is six hundred dollars a year, and some fees, too. He's lucky."

Tom's mother was plainly dazed. She stared at the deacon as though the news had frightened her. Finally she gasped. "It — it's kind of you, Charles. Does — Tom — of course he knows about it?"

"I don't know. I dare say he does, by this time. He didn't know in advance. My policy, you know, isn't to advertise what we mean to do. Where is Tom?"

"I think he's at the express office, helping out." The white-haired woman hesitated, timidly. "Would you mind, Charles, if I should run over there to — tell him — and bring him over here?"

"Good idea," said Mr. Bradshaw. "Bring him over, Phœbe."

"I'll go with you," said Miss Pillicy, rising.

"No — I'd rather not, dear," replied Tom's mother. "I'd almost rather — you know — be alone."

The deacon smiled another mirthless smile. This, in his estimation, was more sentimentality.

"Well, anyway, I'll have to be going home," said the young woman.

"Stay a while, Antonia," came from Prudence, in that voice of hers which was probably intended to be a request, but sounded like a command.

When Mrs. Gilstar had tied her black bonnet under her chin, and gone, there was long silence. Deacon Bradshaw tapped his cane on the floor and cleared his throat. Miss Perkins was looking at him. The deacon knew it. And there they sat — the two shrewdest business men in Tredick — the two richest individuals in the county — the two persons who for thirty years had been rivals in the matter of acquiring mortgages, gilt-edged bonds, parcels of land, and bankbooks. Two capable business men they were — and the woman was the abler of the two — and they both knew it. Both wholly honest, as they construed honesty and they construed it pretty justly; both unbending and unfor-giving in the face of sharp practice or injustice; both uncannily clever in scenting a bargain and driving it — they were different in this: that the woman was the

abler of the two, and knew it, and it served to make her generous, where the deacon was parsimonious. She had been known to forget a mortgage-note; the deacon never.

And there they sat.

Miss Perkins said, "What's the reason, Charles?"

"Reason?" The deacon tried to look innocent.

"Yes, the reason. You have a reason for everything. Tom isn't a fellow you'd pick for constable, naturally. You don't care anything about Phœbe."

"It's for the good of the town, Prudence. Tom will make a good constable. He's big and strong, and the very sight of him would frighten evildoers. And I like Tom. Tom is a good boy. He's a comfort to his mother."

"What else?" was the pitiless pursuit of truth.

"Why — er —" The deacon squirmed. Then he blurted out, "I thought *you'd* appreciate it, Prudence." He glanced anxiously at Antonia as he spoke, and was relieved to note that she was not paying attention — or seemed not to be. Miss Perkins acknowledged the compliment without warmth, by nodding her head.

"How'd you know the boy wanted to be constable?"

"Why, of course he will."

"I don't know as he will. However, he'll speak for himself. Here they come now!"

The sitting room door opened, and mother and son entered, hand in hand. Just before she dropped his hand, Mrs. Gilstar gave it a little squeeze.

Tom Gilstar filled the doorway. His broad shoulders, his height, some six feet and an inch, his trained figure, almost like that of a professional athlete, fulfilled the deacon's estimate of him. He wore a pair of blue overalls, and his hands were stained with the oil barrels he had been handling, but his face was

pleasant to look at. He had the same sensitive nose and mouth, and the same shy blue-gray eyes, as his mother. He stood there awkwardly, after greeting the others.

"Tom, I congratulate you," said the deacon, with great pride, extending his hand.

"I'm sure I thank you, deacon," replied the young fellow. "But — I'm afraid — I don't — that is — I can't take the place."

"Why not, sir?" barked the deacon.

"Because I'm not fitted for it."

"Nonsense! That's just why we got you the place. You're the very one for it." The deacon turned to Antonia Pillicy, and in a tone that intimated that he was especially honoring her by asking her opinion, added, "Don't you think so, Antonia?"

The girl's big dark eyes had been fixed on Tom Gilstar's face. Her hands were clasped tightly in her lap; she bent forward slightly in an attitude of nervous expectancy. As the deacon addressed her, she looked down quickly and replied, "I — I think it's for Tom to decide."

"I don't want you to think I'm not grateful, Mr. Bradshaw," said the big fellow, slowly. "I appreciate your interest. But — I — I never could shoot anybody. I don't want to fight with anybody, even."

"Shoot anybody!" snorted the deacon, exasperated. "Who asked you to shoot anybody? Did Fiske ever shoot anybody, the ten years he was constable? Don't be a fool. Nothing ever happens in Tredick. You'll walk around nights and try the doors of the stores, to see they're locked, and meet the up-train to see that no boozers get off, and — that sort of thing. You'll carry a pistol, as a matter of course. But the chances are you'll never use it, in a lifetime. You're not afraid to carry one, I suppose?" The deacon became scornful.

"People who don't have them, don't use them," was the unexpected reply.

Deacon Bradshaw was not inclined to argue. He threw back his head and issued a manifesto. "If you don't take it, Tom, I wash my hands of you, that's all. It's the chance of a lifetime."

Mrs. Gilstar put out one hand toward her son, and said, timidly, "You'd better consider it, Tom. You know the deacon knows about such things."

Prudence Perkins said, "Tom, either you want it, or you don't want it. There's no law that compels you to take a job you don't want. And I don't know just what difference it makes, Charles, whether you wash your hands of Tom, or whether you wash your hands at all. Our family can take care of itself."

The deacon backed water in a hurry. "Pshaw, Prudence, you know what I meant," he said.

Prudence ignored the apology. She was still shooting toward Tom. "I will say, Tom," she went on, "I'd like to see a little more of the man in you. I don't think being constable is much of a job. But it's better than being a coward."

"Prudence!" came from Mrs. Gilstar. "You don't mean that."

"I didn't say he was a coward," was the deft rejoinder. "I say being constable is better than being a coward. I tell you flatly, though, Phoebe, there are a lot of people in Tredick who think what you thought I said."

Mrs. Gilstar looked up at the picture over the mantelpiece. It was that of a youth in Union blue, of Civil War time. "Tom's father enlisted when he was fifteen," she said, with glistening eyes.

Antonia said nothing. Her eyes were upon Tom Gilstar's face, and her red lips seemed dry and tight.

Tom Gilstar rubbed the back of his hand across his

forehead, which was wet with perspiration. His decent, attractive face was red; his eyes with their queer, wondering, wistful expression, looked straight ahead to the opposite wall.

"Could I let you know the first thing in the morning, deacon?" Tom said, finally.

"Well, yes. But I take it for granted it'll be all right," was the reply. The deacon fetched his own hat from the sewing machine top. At the doorway he turned to Prudence. "Alice wanted me to ask you to come to supper to-night," he said.

"Not to-night. To-morrow night, perhaps," said the spinster, decidedly.

"I've got to go back to the express office for a while," said Tom. So he and Antonia went out together.

They walked along silently for a time. Then the girl put her hand softly into the man's, and let it lie there. They stopped under a big elm. "Tom," she said, very soberly and gently, "I — told you, last week, I'd think over — what you asked. I've been thinking it over — so much. Tom, I'm afraid — it can't be. That I can't. I'm so sorry, Tom. I'm very fond of you. But — I mustn't."

The big fellow looked at her dejectedly. "Tony," he murmured, hoarsely, "don't say that. Don't give me any answer at all — now. — Or," he choked out, "if it was somebody else—"

"No, Tom. Nobody else. Truly, not that."

"You don't care enough for me, then," he offered.

"I care more for you than for any one else in the world, Tom. I have reason to. I shall never forget, Tom, how, when I was a little girl, and first came to school here — and couldn't speak English very well — and they called me Frenchy — how your sister Dorothy came to me and made friends, and helped me with

my studies. I didn't know then, but I know now, because she told me afterwards, that it was you that asked her to. Oh, Tom, there are a good many things I am grateful for. I shall always, always, care much for you. But this — to be your wife — I don't dare."

He was silent. They could hear the beating of their hearts, so close together. Then she threw all her thoughts into one poignant low cry:

"Tom, why do you let them call you a coward? Why do you let them?"

The man winced. "Perhaps — they are right," he answered, dully.

"No!" she cried at him. "It is not so, Tom. I know better. I know."

He shook his head. "It is *something*," he said. "I hate fighting. This horrible war, in Europe, Tony — it almost drives me mad, when I think of it. The idea of fighting — of killing — blood — sometimes I can't get to sleep for hours at night."

"And you think, Tom, you are the only one who lies awake thinking of it!" replied the girl. "Don't you suppose millions of people feel the same way?"

"That's the reason you — can't marry me, then?" he asked, quickly.

"That reason? I don't know exactly what reason you mean. That you don't fight and quarrel and take chances like other young fellows? No; not that. There's something fine, very gentle, in you, Tom, that I love. Anybody would love it, too. But I would want you to fight — for me, Tom — if we were married, and there was ever any need, I think most girls feel like that. I suppose it's terribly foolish of me to say it — and yet, is it so foolish, when we see what is happening in France and Belgium? — that if the time ever came — and we had a little home — you would

fight — yes, you could kill, if it were necessary — to save — us.”

“But, Tony, there won’t be any such time. It’s foolish to consider it seriously,” Tom said.

“It may be. But I can’t feel any other way, now. I don’t think you are a coward, Tom. I think, maybe, if the time came, you could be morally brave — I think that’s what they call it — enduring sorrow, and all that. But — I’m afraid.”

“Afraid to trust yourself to me?” he added.

“Just that — Oh, Tom,” she said, “even when I say this to you, I ache — in here. I want — to be happy. I want you to be happy. But — I have told you what was right I should say.”

He raised his eyes to her after a while, and asked, softly, “Do you think I should take this job as constable, Tony?”

“Yes. Because — something may happen — to make me think differently. It’s no work for you, Tom, I know that. You ought to have left Tredick long ago. There’s nothing here for you. They look upon you as a boy. You are brighter than most anybody — you have a fine, clear mind, in business — my father says so — but there’s nothing here for you. Why have you stayed here so long, Tom?”

“I didn’t want to go away and leave my mother alone,” was the unsuspecting reply.

The girl sighed. She put a hand on his arm. “Good night, Tom. I shall always think of you. Maybe some day, it will all be changed.”

As they went in opposite directions, the big fellow turned once to look at her. She was already out of sight.

“I wonder if I am a coward?” he said, aloud.

He answered, “I guess I am.”

Meanwhile, in his home, Deacon Bradshaw was walking up and down his sitting room, congratulating himself, in the presence of an audience of one — his daughter Alice — on the events of the day. His “slate” had gone through without a hitch. And it never occurred to the excellent deacon that he had done the town anything but a high service, even in giving it a constable who admitted that he was a coward.

II

TOM GILSTAR asked himself whether he were a coward; and out of a certain rugged honesty of heart, he answered that he probably was. Unfortunately for Tom's peace of mind, there was nobody standing by, to explain to him that he was a pacifist. I don't know that it would have made Tom entirely happy, if this had been pointed out to him. Antonia had said that Tom had a good mind, and it was so; and it is about as hard to wring pleasure out of being a pacifist, as it would be to congratulate yourself on being the hole of a doughnut, or a window from which the lights of glass have been poked out.

The fact is, Tredick was far more satisfied with Tom than was Tom with himself; and this brings us to the truth about Tredick. Tredick was a pacifist town.

When the Great War broke out, in August, 1914, Tredick went through the usual emotions of surprise, excitement and wonder. There was talk of "brave little Belgium," there was marvel at the precision of the German military machine, there was a certain curiosity as to how soon Paris would fall, and the show would be over.

As to where the right lay, Tredick had no definite notion. There were hazy feelings of antagonism, one way or another. The Revolutionary War, while not exactly a live issue in Tredick, has still left a bit of suspicion which lingered into the twentieth century. There had been a German bakery in Tredick some years before, and the proprietor had left some hundreds of dollars in unpaid bills behind him; and this served to quicken the revulsion against the Teutons,

particularly with those who had been creditors. There was a shadowy consciousness that somehow, somewhere, the United States had fallen into an honorable debt to France, and had never quite settled up. But the overwhelming feeling was, after the War had gone past its second month, and nobody stopped it, and after it had gone by its third month, and nobody stopped it, that the War was a terrible mistake on somebody's part, and that somebody should stop it.

Through the country, people were saying, "Business as Usual!" even those who had no business, usual or unusual. Tredick echoed, with all its heart, "Business as Usual!" But Tredick went a good deal farther than that, in its thoughts. It said, "Everything as Usual"—including the price of flour, the operation of the saw-mill and woolen-mill, the Wednesday and Saturday picture-show, the crowd on the streets Saturday afternoon, and the rain, sun, moon, stars, and everything else which had become identified with Tredick.

Tredick said to Europe, in its heart, "Don't be foolish! But if you must be foolish, don't disturb Tredick."

The trains from the South have to crawl over a mountain, to get into Tredick; and they crawl over another mountain to get out. Tredick nestles, therefore, like a broody hen, in a sort of nest surrounded by hills. All the territory the other sides of the hills, which you can't see from Tredick, is the United States. Beyond the United States, is the World. Tredick is part of the United States, and is proud of it. The smallest schoolhouse has its flag, and the flag is saluted every morning. The rest of the world is a queer place—and though it has interesting cathedrals and ruins—you never can tell what may happen there. Indeed, there was a huge satisfaction in Tredick, in

1914, that it was not a part of that World, out there, where such disgraceful goings-on were going on.

Well, it was bad enough to have the terrible war going on throughout the Winter of 1914-5; but when Spring came, and the War did not stop, it put the nose of at least one person in Tredick completely out of joint. This was Prof. George Watling Wenham, principal of the High School of Tredick. For a number of years, Professor Wenham had picked up a handsome honorarium by escorting tourists in a personally conducted trip through the European cities. His party had been caught by the war in England, in the Summer of 1914, and had suffered untold misery from being delayed four hours on the trip from London to Liverpool. However, the party had the satisfaction of being regarded as war-scarred veterans when they got home. Between you and me, Professor Wenham had looked forward to escorting his next year's party to the Belgian battle-fields. But next year came, and the war still continued.

Professor Wenham became a pacifist. He was probably the first person in Tredick who knew what the word meant.

But, curious as it may sound, the thing that made Tredick avowedly pacifist, was not the price of corn-meal, which steadily rose and rose till there was no money in poultry: it was the sinking of the *Lusitania*. The news that a great ship, loaded with men, women and children — not soldiers — had been shattered on the great ocean, and left to its fate, sent a sickening shudder through Tredick. This was war, then? This was war?

"If that is War," said Tredick, "we want none of it!" You get the inference that the men, women and babies on the *Lusitania* DID want war, were going into War for the joy of carnage. Tredick got no ironic

inference like this. All Tredick got was a shudder and a more definite notion than it had had for a long time.

For weeks after that *Lusitania* murder, Tredick people looked at each other and said, shaking their heads, "War is a terrible thing!"

It was like the discovery of a new element in Nature, or a new theorem in geometry. "War is a terrible thing!"

Prof. George Watling Wenham met Deacon Bradshaw on the street in front of the postoffice, and said, weighing each word, "War is a terrible thing!"

"Yes," replied the deacon, with an answering way, "War is a terrible thing, professor."

When the deacon entered the postoffice, he came close to Henry Hobgood, the postmaster, and said, slowly and awfully, "War is a terrible thing, Henry."

"Yes," replied Henry, "War is a terrible thing." Then Henry, who had his own troubles, too, added, after a long pause, "Look at them sacks of parcel post stuff, deacon! They're making a reg'lar damn express-man of us."

But just the same, Henry Hobgood was not forgetting the truth which had just been offered him. He went home and told Mrs. Hobgood that war was a terrible thing.

Then came a doleful fear and trembling. There were American Citizens on the *Lusitania*. Would, could, should the United States go to war about that?

Prof. George Watling Wenham said, in a tone of authority, "They had no business on the *Lusitania*. They were warned not to travel on that English ship." Tredick took hope in an instant. Tredick said, at first in a small, questioning voice, "They had no business on that ship?"

Then Tredick said in a little louder voice, "What

right have a few stubborn people to drag us into war?"

Then Tredick said, in a little louder voice, "What RIGHT have a few stubborn people to drag us into this terrible war?"

Then Tredick said, very loudly, "WHAT RIGHT have a FEW STUBBORN PEOPLE to drag us into THIS TERRIBLE WAR?"

There were diplomatic notes dispatched from the United States to Europe. Tredick read the newspapers more avidly than Tredick had ever read anything. It was all very confusing to Tredick. What did the President mean by this? What does he mean by that? He is a good man; he is a wise man; he will not drag us into war — or will he? He will not. But he had better be careful — very careful. War is a terrible thing. We are so happy as we are! See Tredick — how peaceful Tredick is! See those young men — how strong and supple they are. You would not send such fine boys to war, would you? Who started this war, anyway? Kings and gun-manufacturers! And you want to drag Tredick into it! No, no! We have no quarrel with anybody. Ha, ha! You are a good fellow, Fritz — shake hands with Tredick! See, we have no quarrel, have we? War is a terrible thing. Ask Joe Finney. He fought in the Civil War.— So Tredick, in the person of Professor Wenham, asks Joe Finney.

Joe was lounging in the sunshine in front of the postoffice when Professor Wenham approached him and said, "War is a terrible thing, Joe! I guess you can testify to that."

Joe is seventy-eight years old. Chewing tobacco and whisky should have killed him long ago. Joe spat into the gutter, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and answered, "Oh, I dunno, professor.

I had a good time. Only thing ever bothered me was lice."

"Joe isn't over bright, anyway," remarked the professor, afterwards.

O, Tredick, it is done and over with now! We are in shining armor, on the fields of Lorraine; the banners of our legions flutter in the breezes that blow across the Moselle; we are in Flanders, on the Meuse, and behind the earth ramparts and in the burrows of Verdun. We look back on all that to laugh. It is all over now. But then — it was:

Will *he* keep us out of war? Have we really any right on the high seas? Even if we have, have we any right to exercise that right? We mustn't get dragged into this war. War is a terrible thing. Thank God we are not in it. Prudence Perkins did not raise her boy to be a soldier. (Prudence has never had any children; has never been married? That's so; well, then, Mrs. Alec Walker did not raise her boy to be a soldier. What's that? Oh, yes, that's right, come to think of it; young Walker drank himself to death. But hang it, you can't deny the principle is right.) Let them fight it out in Europe. What has Tredick to do with Europe? . . .

At night, Tom Gilstar patrolled the village limits of Tredick. The job was not so bad, when he got to it. It was no trouble at all to put Tobe Willis in the cooler. Often he shouldered the little drunken man and toted him like a child. He tried all the doors of the business places to see if they were locked; and it gave Tom Gilstar a peculiar, pleasant sense of power to know that he had keys that would open almost any house in the village.

After midnight, everything usually was very quiet. Only a few lights burned. He went down the street

where Matt Pillicy lived, nearly every night, and stood for a while, with a clutch at his heart, looking up at the dark outlines of the house. He wondered whether 'Tony was sound asleep; or whether she perhaps had waked a little, and was thinking — about things. He often wondered, as he looked up into silent second-floors of houses, what people in there were dreaming about. Or whether they did as he used to do (queerly enough he slept better now, in the daytime) — lie awake with dismal pictures of the War hurrying through his head.

He who walks at night learns many things about the night; and so did Tom Gilstar; and he learned many things about Tredick, too; and yet there was much that he did not learn.

How could Tom Gilstar know that when he made his rounds, and thought that he was looking upon Tredick asleep, that he was really looking upon a Tredick waking from a long sleep; upon a Tredick stirring uneasily, rubbing its eyes after a long sleep — of twenty, thirty, forty years? Yes, forty years at least, Tredick had been asleep, going about its business to be sure, but only half awake, because it had forgotten that Tredick was still a part of the World.

Nothing ever happened in Tredick, said Deacon Bradshaw. But something was happening in Tredick now. Tredick was not sleeping soundly any more. Tredick was lying awake, in doubt, in fear, in hope, in prayer, hoping that the thing would not come to Tredick.

"War is a terrible thing," said Tredick, and turned over, vainly hoping that the old sleep would come.

"He will keep us out of the war," said Tredick, and turned over restlessly again.

"We don't want to go to war," said Tredick, get-

ting up and lighting the lamp, and looking at the clock, and being amazed to find that it was only one o'clock, when it seemed certainly five.

And all the time, grimly and surely, with a slow progress that not all the prayers and hopes and doubts of Tredick could stay, the Thing was making its way to Tredick — the War was coming over those hills and down into the valley wherein nestled Tredick, Tredick of the sleepy eye.

Tredick had elected a constable, to watch over it at night — a constable who admitted, at least to himself, that he was a coward. Secure, then, in its belief that nothing would ever happen in Tredick, Tredick tried to sleep. Probably Tredick felt sure that nothing really was happening in Tredick.

Now that it is all over — that period of doubt and fear, that period of hiding one's head in the sand and declaring that one was well hid; that period of declaring peace when no Peace existed any longer in the world — Tredick knows what was keeping it awake. It was merely trying to accommodate itself to some very old truths — trying to ignore them, first, and then, failing in that, to adjust itself to them — some very old truths learned by Tredick's ancestors who had forged, by blood and muscle, a new freedom in the world. And the truths were these:

That there is something worse than pain, and that is, the fear of pain;

That there is something worse than grief, and that is, never to have known the awakening, unfolding experience of grief;

That there is something worse than war, and that is, peace without honor;

That there is something far worse than the death of the body, and that is, the slow, cancerous, dry-rot of the soul.

III

PRUDENCE PERKINS went over to Deacon Bradshaw's for supper, as she had promised. The deacon was all deference, all solicitude for her comfort. He was afraid Prudence was not eating enough. He was afraid the chair she sat in was not the softest chair. Prudence eyed the deacon with a cynical eye, and waited. She knew Charles Bradshaw, and she knew that he had something on his mind.

Meanwhile, Alice Bradshaw, quick, witty, blooming with the full health of the out-of-doors soul which she was, bronze-gold of hair, clear hazel of eye, sat serving and eating the excellent food she had cooked with her own hands, and said nothing at all. Once in a while she cast a humorous glance at her father, when he was particularly attentive to Miss Perkins' welfare. To the clear, straight-minded young woman, the deacon was as transparent as the window-glass. She laughed at him inwardly, and loved him a good deal.

Toward Prudence, the girl was frank, courteous, modest, and not at all solicitous. And so Prudence liked her tremendously. The two women, one of them old and the other young, and both shrewd in their years, enjoyed the spectacle of a wealthy cast-iron deacon flattering a bessemer-steel spinster, because he wanted advice from her, in business.

"War is a terrible thing, Prudence," began the deacon, with a manufactured groan, as they sat away from the table a little. "But, thank the Lord, our country is not in it."

"I wouldn't thank the Lord too soon, Charles," was the crisp response.

"Why, you don't think it's possible we could —" began the deacon, with genuine anxiety.

"I think anything is possible, since they passed the income-tax law," replied the business-lady of Tredick.

The deacon shifted his chair a trifle nearer Miss Perkins. "Now, er, that you have mentioned that, er, matter of the income tax, Prudence," he said, thoughtfully, "er —"

"You want to know if I'm going to dodge it? No."

"Sakes alive, you have a blunt way of putting things, Prudence," remonstrated the good man. "I merely wanted to know —"

"Please don't be a faker, Charles. I know what you've been thinking of. I've always dodged taxes, same as you have. They're fixing it, gradually, so we can't dodge. I'm not going to wait till they threaten me with jail. I'm going to pay up — and then claim I'm a patriot."

"It'll cost you a pretty penny," said the deacon, mournfully, thinking of the pretty penny it would cost him.

"I've *got* a pretty penny," was the retort. "So have you. Pay up, Charles. It'll hurt for a minute, but you'll feel better for it afterwards."

The deacon shook his head, sadly.

"There was another thing, a rather important thing, Prudence, I wanted to ask your advice on." The deacon looked at his daughter. Then he went on, explaining to Prudence, "you know I always speak of these things before Alice. Alice has a wise head. She knows all about my business."

"I think if you're going to ask advice, father, you ought to pay for it," said Alice, with humor only apparent in her eyes.

"Oh, that's all right, Charles," said Prudence, with

a grim smile. "I'll tell you what I think, without charge. What is it?"

"Well, you know the executors are going to sell the Williams Dry-Goods Store to-morrow. I — if it went at a reasonable figure — I might — it's a fairly good property — there's very little competition — I've got some one in mind that could take charge of it — well, I might invest a little in it. Er — I wanted to ask you — what would you do?"

The deacon looked up at Prudence searchingly, trying to read her emotions. If Prudence had any emotions, her face did not reveal them. In her eyes there was just the faintest indication of a tinge of malice — just a shade of evidence that she was tired of having the deacon, whom she had soundly thrashed in several business deals, pulling at her skirts for counsel. The deacon seemed to have been doing this more than usual, lately. It was as though he had begun to distrust his own judgment, and yearned to lean on that wiry, downright business arm opposite him.

Without a moment's hesitation, Miss Perkins said, shortly, "If I followed my impulse, I'd probably do it."

The deacon sat back, with a just-audible sigh. "Hum!" he said. "Hum!" Then he shut his eyes, and twiddled his thumbs a moment, as his hands lay across his shirtfront. Then he said, "Thankye, Prudence."

A new idea seemed to strike the deacon. "The good-will is the main part of the investment," he said. "You don't suppose there's a chance of another dry-goods store starting up?"

"Nobody has spoken to me of one," replied Prudence.

"Hum! Thankye."

The deacon leaned back in his chair, satisfied. The supper had been paid for. Mr. Bradshaw permitted himself to become expansive. "Well," he said, "Tom Gilstar's got a good job, Prudence, and I guess the town's got a good constable."

"Maybe," said Prudence, without enthusiasm.

"I wanted to see Tom get the place. Tom is a good boy. I like any boy that is good to his mother, and minds his p's and q's." The deacon glanced at his daughter. Then he continued, "It's a pity your sister's other boy turned out the way he did."

It was not well for Deacon Bradshaw that he failed to perceive the sparks that flashed from the anvil-eyes of the spinster. The deacon was celebrating himself, after a good supper, and perceived nothing but his own present satisfaction. But he sat up a little straighter when Prudence snapped:

"You mean Sheridan Gilstar! I don't agree with you. How do you know how he turned out?"

"Well, he hasn't been heard of in a couple years, and when people don't let you hear from them, it's usually because there's nothing good to hear," clicked the deacon.

The tall Prudence rose from her chair, as if she felt that she could say what she had to say better if she were standing. She reached a thin, knotty hand toward the deacon, and her voice quavered with an emotion that few people ever saw in her, "Now Charles," she said, biting the words off sharply, "I've heard you casting slurs on Sherry Gilstar a good many times, before and since he left Tredick; and I've held my peace. You ran Sherry Gilstar out of this town —"

Charles Bradshaw held up a hand and started to deny.

"Oh, I know you didn't tell him to go, in so many

words! But you gave him to understand that you were going to make it hot for him, if he stayed. Because he and a couple other young colts, who had too much energy, took your buggy and mare from in front of the postoffice, and went for a joy-ride, and got smashed up, and because once in a while Sherry got into some other boyish deviltry that didn't hurt anybody much, you made up your mind that he couldn't stay here any longer — and you had your way. Now, Charles Bradshaw, I'm going to tell you something. I've been thinking a good deal about things, these last two or three years — and not about making money, either. This war ought to make everybody think, if they've got anything to think with. And I've about come to the conclusion that when Sherry Gilstar left Tredick, about the only real, live, red-blooded man in the place left."

Up to this moment Alice Bradshaw has been almost a silent participant in the festivities. She had been, for the most part, sitting quietly, with eyes that showed something of boredom, something of being ashamed of her father's clumsy business-and-social efforts, and something of amusement. Now, as Prudence spoke, the young woman's face glowed with interest. The look in her eyes changed to one of gratitude — it could have been nothing else — and she leaned forward to catch every word.

"Yes, sir," Miss Perkins went on, shaking a lean forefinger, "you and I, and the rest of them, who have had our eyes on our own little games, to get a dollar, or avoid discomfort, or what not, have been slowly taking all the manhood and womanhood out of Tredick. First it's been one thing, and then another. The children mustn't make any noise on the Fourth of July. No; gather the dear little things together and let them listen for two hours to that windbag George

Watling Wenham, up at the Academy, while he tells them how to be little Lord Fauntleroy's, and say hurrah with their handkerchiefs. When you and I went to school, Charles Bradshaw, there were still men school teachers; and the boys tried to lick the teacher, and the teacher usually licked them, or lost his job, and after he gave them a thrashing that they remembered all their lives, they'd have followed him to the end of the world, and beyond. The first licking you ever got, Charles, I remember — because I was so tickled I didn't know what to do — and it was for kicking the teacher in the shins. You had a little sand *then*, anyway. Now, if one of the boys throws a spit-ball at the teacher, you have him up before the board and want to send him to the reform school. Little by little we've been taking all the nerve, all the jump and go, out of everybody, until now you can go from one end of the village to the other without finding a man who would dare say boo to a grasshopper. Poor Sherry Gilstar! He was born in the wrong place. He ought to have been a Frenchman, or an Englishman. Oh, I wish I were a man! I'd show them!"

"Now, Prudence —" gasped the deacon.

"Don't Prudence me, Charles. You're going to point out what a model town Tredick is, and how nobody ever gets into trouble, and all that. I know it. I've been pointing that out to everybody — up to a few years ago. Now, I don't know whether I'm proud of it or not. A box with nothing in it doesn't rattle — and a dead dog doesn't bark — but I don't know as either of them is anything to be proud of. This war — somehow it makes some things clearer to me — I'm muddled, all muddled over it, of course — and yet it makes me see some things clearer. — I'm getting excited. — I guess I'd better stop. — But I don't want to hear any more slurs about Sherry Gilstar. If

he has gone to the dogs, it was because we never gave him a chance to go anywhere else."

The deacon was plainly puzzled by the tirade. He said, weakly, "Well, now, Prudence, you wouldn't compare Sheridan Gilstar with his brother Tom?"

"Wouldn't compare them? Indeed I wouldn't compare them! Don't think that I don't like Tom — he's a nice boy, and all that — but — oh, Sherry was a man! — there was something about him, something big and generous and strong inside — he'd fight at the drop of a hat, I know — but he never bullied a boy who wasn't his size, and I never knew him to take a mean advantage of anybody. Don't you remember the time he shinned up the pole on top of the town hall and hung — er-a — a lady's undergarment up there, Charles? It wasn't a bright thing to do, I know that — but the point is, what boy in this town to-day would shin that pole? It took nerve — and Sherry had it. — The time may come, Charles, in this country, when we'll feel a heap safer with the Sherry Gilstars to protect us and our property, than with the Tom Gilstars."

The deacon smiled in toleration of this exaggeration. "Pshaw! Nothing ever happens in Tredick," he said.

"No, nothing ever happens in Tredick," repeated Prudence, drily.

"I guess, when it comes to that, you don't want young rascals overturning your property and stealing your horse and buggy, and raising Cain generally," persisted the deacon, as a clincher.

Miss Prudence Perkins, before she replied, took up her shawl, planted her hat firmly on her head, ran two hatpins through it as though she were impaling Tredick, and went to the door. There she turned and said her last word.

"If you had had as much sand as Sherry Gilstar when you were his age — the age he left Tredick —

I'd have probably been working for you now, for my board and clothes," said Prudence, with a grin. "Good-night, Charles."

A red flush flowed over the deacon's face, and he went back into his chair limply, with a gurgled "Good night." It was a Parthian shot — straight to the bull's-eye. For, when the late Mrs. Bradshaw had been alive, the deacon had been notoriously stingy with her. Some folks said that this was the reason why Alice, in these days, had everything she wanted — because the deacon had been stricken with remorse. At any rate, it rolled the deacon flat, and he didn't even hear his daughter follow Miss Perkins out the door.

Prudence turned, at the gate, when she heard Alice coming. "I want to walk home with you, Miss Perkins," said the girl.

"I do hope," said Alice, "that my father doesn't annoy you too much. Really, he means well, but he's got it into his head lately that you know ever so much more about investments than he does — he isn't sure of himself these days."

"My dear," replied Prudence, taking the girl's arm, "you can't tell me anything about your father. We went to school together. I like him well enough to quarrel with him — and to beat him at a trade, if I can. — But you had something else you wanted to say?"

The wing which the spinster held, fluttered.

"Yes, I had," said the younger woman, in a trembling voice. "I — I wanted to thank you — at least I wanted to say — that — it was nice of you to take Sherry Gilstar's part. I never dare to say anything at all when father talks about him. I can manage dad on most subjects, but not when he gets on that one. He's very much against Sherry. So — I wanted to —"

Miss Perkins halted, faced the girl, and took her by both arms, and looked into her face, even though it was dark.

"You liked him, didn't you?" she said, in what was for her a gentle tone.

There was no reply. "I knew you did, dear," Prudence went on. "I never said a word about it to anybody. Perhaps, Alice, we'll see him again one of these days. Now, don't take on like that. You'll have me doing it, too, and I'm too old for that sort of nonsense."

"You've never heard of him — since?" faltered the girl, after a time.

"Not since the day before he was discharged from the army, in the Philippines. Nobody has. I — I don't know what to think. But I have a feeling that we're going to see Master Sherry again."

"Good night," said Alice. "Somehow, I feel — a little bit — happy."

"Good night," replied Prudence. "Somehow, you know, I do too. — We're a couple of geese."

IV

THAT night, about twenty minutes past twelve, when the up-train stopped at the Tredick station, Tom Gilstar was on the station platform. It was part of his duty to meet that train, and inspect those who might get off.

The usual two or three traveling men alighted sleepily, threw their grips into the waiting hotel 'bus, and climbed after them. Two railway employees, who lived in Tredick, passed Tom and greeted him cheerily. That seemed to be the full list; but, as the train started up again, Tom saw two figures drop from the last coach, some hundred-odd feet beyond the station platform. He waited for them, expecting them to approach the station along the plank walk. Instead, they went across the road-bed at right angles to the track and disappeared in the darkness of a clump of trees.

For a few moments, Tom Gilstar stood there looking in the direction the two figures had gone. The 'bus rattled away. It was very quiet. Tom could hear the thumping of his own heart. He walked a few steps down the platform, and then stopped irresolutely. He wondered whether he ought to follow after the strangers, if they were strangers. There was no road at the place they had entered the woods, and to attempt to go around and head them off, seemed futile. It was the first suspicious incident since Tom had become constable of Tredick, and the sense of duty in him was quarreling with his strong desire to go back "down town" and let the matter drop.

"It might be a couple of tramps who were told to drop off here," the big fellow told himself. "Likely they'll wait for the first through freight, and catch on." It looked like a reasonable explanation, and it afforded Tom a vast relief. He stood for a few moments under the electric lamp on the station platform, listening; and hearing nothing, went slowly back to the center.

At the edge of the woods, however, two pairs of eyes were fixed on Tom Gilstar, as he was shown in half-silhouette under the light. One of the men who had dropped from the train said, after a pause, "That looks too big to be Fiske! The cop they used to have here, Hop, was a little guy, with whiskers the color of canned salmon. He was full of pep, though. They must have a new one."

"Well, what are you going to do? Stand here all night?" said the other man.

"I was just wondering, Hop," was the reply. "I don't want to slide into town at this time of night. You know we're just here on a gamble, and I don't want too many to get hep. I've got reasons."

"Well, this is a hell of a note, Gillie!" growled the second voice. "When we left New York, you was talking like you was going right in and introduce us to the mayor, and they was going to set us up a banquet, and do that fat calf stuff, and give a few weeps onto your necktie. Now, when we get in this dump, your feet get all frostbite, and you want to lean against the trees all night. Say, kid, this is bum comedy, believe me."

There was a soft, good natured, really musical laugh. "The bull has taken a sneak, Hop," came the answer, as the figure of Tom Gilstar disappeared. "Don't get sore, Hop. I have a little cold feet, that's a bet. The nearer I got to this burg, the chillier it seemed.

If things looked as good and easy, close-up, as they do from a distance, it would be a cinch to walk in and ask J. Pierp Morgan for a million dollars. You know that. Now, listen, kid-o! It's half-past twelve. Now this isn't Broadway, Hop. The hour is so late in this burg, that you might almost say it was the day after the night before. Why, there's folks here, bo, that make the sun feel like a piker, the minute he shows his head. They've done a day's work by breakfast time, and then kick because time passes so quick they can't accomplish anything."

"And you want to come back here to live!" was the answering groan.

"Well, Hop, old boy, it isn't so bad, after all. Yes, I'd like to come back. You'll like it, after you get used to it, too."

"I wouldn't live that long, Gillie.— Look! Lamp that black-and-white cat walking along the track! Honest, Gillie, I'm so lonesome, I've got a mind to adopt that cat. Here, kitty, kitty!"

A restraining arm seized the prospective cat-adopter. "Leave it alone, Gillie! You don't want to adopt that cat! That's a skunk. Wait a minute and you'll get a whiff. I can get you a louder whiff of perfumery by heaving a brick at the little kitty. But I guess you'll be satisfied with what you get."

In a moment Hop was satisfied. "Let's go, Gillie!" he said. "When's the first train back to New York? Whew, I'd rather stand outside the back door of a Greek restaurant!"

Gillie snickered. Then his voice became serious. "Now, look, Hop," he said. "I'm going to ask you to go easy on me, just this time. I'd like to shoot you down to the hotel, and buy you a soft bed. But I want to keep shady a while. We've been good pals together, and put up with worse stuff than this. We're going

to beat it now for a lumberman's shanty — if it's still there, and I suppose it is. There are a couple bunks in it, and we can sit down under cover, anyway. Tomorrow is my big day, Hop; you've got to help me. Now don't get sore, will you?"

Hop answered with a grunt that was an affirmation to anything, anyhow. "Lead on!" he replied. "I'm game. I've worn a hole in the bark of this tree with the small of my back."

They went over to the station, then to the road that ran diagonally from it, along this road several hundred yards, then into the woods by a foot path. The leader went along with the precision of a good woodsman who also knows the country he travels. The campfollower stumbled along, without missing a single root that projected above the ground, or a single embracing branch which hung down from the trees. Once in a while the leader heard a heartfelt "F" Gawd-sake!" from his follower, and chuckled softly. Finally they stopped.

"Here we are, Hop!" said Gillie. "Got a match? Never mind, I've got my flash. I forgot I had it."

He snapped on an electric hand-lamp, which flooded the hut, into which they had passed, with a blinding brilliance. It was a shanty with two bunks on one side, a small stove, a table, and a chair with two legs intact leaning against the wall.

"The Waldorf-Astoria!" exclaimed Hop. "Push the button, Gillie, and order up a couple of drinks."

"I'm done with drinks, even in my imagination," was the reply, with unexpected soberness. "But I could use a club sandwich."

"Why couldn't we have a little fire in that stove?" asked Hop. "It's colder than it was."

"You're up a thousand feet higher than you were. Sure we can have a fire. I'll get some wood. And,

yes! There's a lantern. Maybe it's got oil in it. It has — a little."

"Don't leave me here too long," said Hop. "I got plenty of nerve, most times, but this voyage has got my goat. I don't know where I am any more than a baby."

The other man soon came back with an armful of dry fagots, and started a fire. With the lantern lighted, they both sat on the edge of the lower bunk, smoking.

"Now, look, Hop," began the leader, "this lantern won't last long, and I want to look you in the eye when I tell you a few things. First of all, I want to tell you that you're a real pal, to follow my tracks like this. Oh, yes, you are: I mean it. When I first asked you, didn't think you'd fall for this straight-and-narrow-path stuff. Well, Hop, we're here! And I'm stronger than ever for quitting the boys, and the rough stuff. We may make our living a heap harder, Hop, but I think we'll be better satisfied."

"I think you're dreaming through your nose," was the reply. "But I can be shown."

"Well, look here," said Gillie, who, the lantern-light showed, was a medium-sized, pale-faced, black-haired fellow, certainly less than twenty-five years old, and with dark eyes that were luminous when he became enthusiastic. Also, when he stood, his back squared off, and his shoulders were thrown well to the rear, and he had a way of keeping his chin well tucked in. "Look here, Hop. We've been going crooked for a long time now — and we've fingered quite a bunch of dough, altogether. What have we got to show for it? How much money you got?"

"About seven dollars."

"I've got less than ten. That's *one* reason why I think we can do better on the straight. Number two

— where's Pug Blaine? Where's Dicky Wilson? Where's Katy Getz?"

"All doing their stretches," was the prompt answer.

"Yes. All up the river.— Number three — I've got tired of dodging and jumping sideways every time I see a bull coming. I'd like to look somebody in the eyes now and then. Oh, I'm sure of it, Hop! Besides —"

Gillie stopped, and considered before he went on. "I know a girl here, Hop. I never said anything about her —"

"Huh! You didn't have to. I knew there was a skirt —"

"Wait a minute, Hop. You mean all right when you say 'skirt,' but I — it don't sound good. This is different, Hop. This girl — well — I — God, she may be married, for all I know! Well, but even if she is, and she should meet me, I bet she'd put out her hand and say, with that old pal smile of hers on her glorious face, 'Hop,' I bet she'd say, 'I'm glad to see you, Sherry' —"

"Sherry? What's that — another monaker?"

The other man stopped, hesitated, then laughed. "Hop, I'll tell you my right name if you'll tell me yours."

"Mine is Murray — honest to God Murray, just like that. George Murray."

"Well, mine is Sheridan Gilstar. My dad fought under Phil Sheridan, in the sixties, and a long time afterward, when I was born, he got even with Phil by naming me after him. Gee, my dad must have been the kind of a man to carry a grudge a long time.— Anyhow, as I was saying, there is — or there was, maybe — the girl. She's the daughter of a rich old — well I mustn't call any names, now — but he chased me out of here — you get me! I guess I was a pretty

rough kid. Perhaps the old man was right. Now, Hop, I want to see that girl before — even before I see my mother. — Hop, you don't suppose — you don't suppose anybody — has died since — since —”

“Oh, of course not. Cheer up!” said Hop.

“If — she's here — I want to see her first. There's where you come in. I'm going to give you a note, in the morning, and I want you to take it to her. Nobody knows you down there. She'll know — whether I've got the right dope. If she isn't married — she'll see me — I know she will. If they — don't want me — or anything — why, kid, we'll beat it back to Broadway.”

“I'll be your little Cupid,” snickered Hop, with a grin.

“You go to blazes,” said Sherry Gilstar, making a good-natured pass at his companion. “Will you do it?”

“Yes.”

“Now, maybe we can get a little sleep,” said Sherry, with a sigh of relief.

“Where — on those?” said Hop, pointing to the bare boards.

“Sure. Why not?”

“Well,” said Hop, half sourly, half-humorously, “you've got a great and pining love to sustain your carcass, bo. But there's nothing between me and them planks.”

V

HOP MURRAY surprised himself by going to sleep — or rather, by waking up to discover that he had been asleep. The first thing that greeted his drowsy eyes was the figure of Sherry Gilstar, seated on a wooden box by the stove, with his face buried in his hands.

“Hello, Gillie! — I mean Sherry!” shouted Hop. “Asleep?”

“No, Hop,” replied Sherry. “Just thinking.— It’s half-past seven. Here’s that note I want you to take down to — the girl. I’ll take you out as far as the main road, and then you can’t miss. After you cross the railroad tracks, turn to the left and go down the hill. You’ll pass a bakeshop, where you can stop in and get breakfast. Then ask somebody where Deacon Bradshaw lives. I’ll look for you back here by ten, anyway.”

“Where does your breakfast come in?” was the solicitous reply.

“I don’t feel like eating.— Come on.”

After fifteen minutes of quick walking, Hop Murray crossed the railroad, and entered what Tredick call its “center.” He found the bakery, ordered a double quantity of bacon and eggs, and, after eating ravenously, sat back and looked out the window at the town. What he saw of it didn’t impress him, judging from the sardonic grin that came on his face. “I should think a wise guy like Sherry would be glad to stick away from a jasper joint like this,” he remarked, to himself.

Meanwhile, three or four pairs of curious eyes were looking the stranger over, as they looked all strangers

over. What they saw was a tall, sparely built fellow, with reddish-brown hair and a good many freckles, a pair of the most innocent kind of blue eyes, a sharpish nose, and a weak chin. The cut of his clothes, and vague something about his manner, indicated that he did not belong in, or, anywhere near, Tredick. From Garstand, the baker, Hop learned how to get to the Bradshaw house.

"But," said Garstand, "if you want to see the Deacon, you'll probably find him over at the town clerk's office. I just saw him go in the townhall."

"Thanks," said Hop, sagaciously. "Maybe he'll be over there." Then he walked down the street thoughtfully, and was soon knocking at the door of a big square, mansard-roofed house that stood well back from the street, surrounded by trees. It was Alice Bradshaw who came to the door. "Good morning?" she replied, questioningly, to Hop's courteous salute. For reply, he handed her the piece of folded, torn paper from a memorandum book. He watched her face, as she read.

The girl looked first, as most people do, at the signature. Instantly a warm flush came on her face, suffusing even her neck. She gave a little choke; her fingers tightened perceptibly on the paper, and she read avidly. Then, for several seconds, she fixed her clear eyes on the bearer of the message.

"Is he really — here?" were the first words the young woman uttered.

"Yes, ma'am."

"You are his friend?"

Hop nodded, feeling somehow very uncomfortable.

Alice looked at the stranger again. There was nothing of suspicion in her glance; yet something of a deeply imbedded native prudence made her look at the

note once more. Then she said, slowly and distinctly, though her hands trembled and her bosom was rising and falling sharply, and there was a little convulsive movement of her lips:

"I'll — yes. If you will wait for me a few moments, I'll go back with you."

"He told me to say that he'd be at *your* tree," said Hop.

"At — my — tree!" repeated the girl. "Yes — I know." Her eyes closed for a moment, and when she opened them, the lashes were moist. "Yes — I know."

A few minutes afterward, they left the house and walked rapidly back through the center. It was Alice Bradshaw who set the pace. Hop kept along by her side rather awkwardly, and silent. Nor did she speak. At the railroad tracks, Hop stopped, coughed once or twice, and pulled off his hat.

"I s'pose you know what he meant by that tree, miss," he said. "And maybe you'd just as soon I'd quit you here."

She flashed him a look of gratitude for the little delicacy. "Yes," she replied. "Thank you. But I'll see you later, won't I?"

Hop nodded, and turned off toward the railroad station, and the girl went forward alone, with eager steps that advertised her youth and her love of the open roads.

There was a big oak tree, not far from the main road, on a little spur-trail which had been used to bring out logs and lumber. Under that tree they met. She came toward him with a little cry of welcome, holding out her hand. Sherry Gilstar held out his hand, too, but he approached the young woman timidly and nervously. For a half a minute they looked each other full in the eyes.

"I knew you'd come back home, sometime, Sherry," she said, finally. "It's good to see you."

"It's better than good to see you, Alice," he replied. Then he added, awkwardly, "You must have wondered why I had the cheek to ask you to come up here. I — didn't know whether you'd come or not."

"Oh, I didn't think anything about what was proper, if that's what you mean, Sherry," the girl laughed. "I wanted to see you, that's all."

He shook his head, and looked down at the ground. "That's the way I was afraid it would be," he said. "I mean, I was afraid you'd come."

"Afraid I'd come —"

"Oh, I wanted you to. But now, I mean, I feel — your coming right away to see me, like this — it makes me feel —"

The young fellow stopped. He straightened up, threw back his shoulders, and took a deep breath.

"I've got a load on my mind, and I might as well get it off quick," he said. "Besides, it's only fair to you, Alice. — I've come back to Tredick to — stay — and try it over again, if nobody has any objection."

"To stay, Sherry! Really!" she cried, joyously.

"Well, yes; if I could make a go of it. It depends on whether the folks here want me — that's the size of it."

"You mean my father. Oh, I know you can make it all right with him —"

"Your father — and others, too. I wanted to see you first, Alice, and tell you — the truth — that I — I haven't been on the level — all the time — since you haven't heard from me —"

"On the level?" she interrupted. "You don't mean you've done anything very wrong, Sherry?"

"Yes, I have, Alice; I haven't done much that was right. In the army — you knew I was in the Philip-

pinetrees — I was all right. I've got an honorable discharge in my pocket. I landed in 'Frisco, off the transport, with the idea of coming home. I — something went wrong — I didn't get here. I lost money — gambling — and — there didn't seem to be any use — and I met up with a crowd — well, I don't want to say anything more, little girl. The point is, I'm all done with — with that, if I can get another start. — Oh, don't look at me that way, Alice! Please — you can say the worst things you know how, to me — I can stand that — but —"

"I didn't mean to look any particular way, Sherry," she said, softly. "I was just thinking of some way to tell you that no matter what's happened, I'm glad to see you, and it will be all right. It will be so fine! Your mother — what will she say, Sherry, when she sees you? And your brother — did you know, Sherry, that Tom is our constable now?"

"Tom — constable?" repeated Sherry. "You're joking, Alice, aren't you?"

"Indeed I'm not."

Sherry Gilstar burst out laughing at the idea. "Why — Tom — great Scott! — that's a corker, isn't it? Why, Tom — of course Tom is an awfully fine fellow, I know that — but I didn't suppose he had nerve enough. You know Tom was always afraid to get his head under water, so he never learned to swim. When we boys played 'stump-the-leader,' Tom always used to quit first. He must have changed."

"Well, he's constable, anyway," was the non-committal answer.

"Oh, well, Alice, I'm glad for Tom. Only it did seem a little queer."

"Is your friend, who came to our house, going to stay here in Tredlick too?"

"I hope so. His name is Murray. He's been a

real pal, Hop has. I'm afraid he won't like it here at first. Hop is a New Yorker, dyed in the wool, and he gets miserable and lonesome every time he gets out of sight of the skyscrapers. But I'm hoping he'll like it. — The first thing, of course is to get jobs. I want to get to work, Alice. I want to begin to build up, again. I'll take most any old thing that will give me a living. I'm pretty well acquainted with gas engines, now — worked on 'em in the army. In fact I'm — something of a machinist." As he spoke, Sherry's eyes glowed with enthusiasm, and he gesticulated with his hands in the manner he had somehow caught up from the Latins of the Eastern Seas.

"Oh, I'm sure there'll be something good for you, Sherry," said Alice, catching the enthusiasm.

"There's one thing," added Sherry, becoming very sober again. "You don't suppose — folks will be too inquisitive — about what — where I've been — and all that. I know you are solid gold, Alice — but — but the town — Tredick —"

"You don't have to mind what people say," she answered quickly. "It's your own business.— And now, Sherry, I think you'd better come down to our house. I want you to see my father, the very first thing. You won't pay any attention to him if he isn't cordial at first, will you? I'm sure after you tell him what you've told me — I mean about wanting to go to work here — and — all — he'll be glad. I'm sure —"

The young fellow and girl had been so engrossed with their affairs that they had not heard a carriage drive up to the end of the log-road; nor had they heard any one approaching. The first intimation they had, that they were no longer alone, was a tight, distressed voice, which cried, "Alice!"

They turned quickly, and faced Deacon Bradshaw. The deacon had evidently been running, and was other-

wise laboring under unwonted excitement. He was staring at the young people with amazement and displeasure. But it was apparent that he did not look sharply enough at Sherry Gilstar to recognize him.

"Father!" said the girl. "What — are you doing here?"

"What am I doing here?" responded the old man, breathlessly. "I should like to know what you're doing here — what you mean by coming up here with a strange man — everybody in the village talking about it —"

"Please don't be silly, now, dad," said the girl. "We'll explain everything. This is Sherry Gilstar, father. He's come back —"

"Sherry Gilstar!" cried the deacon. Then he shot one look at the young fellow, and involuntarily stepped back. The distress and wonder in his eyes gave place instantly to anger. His white-bearded lower lip and chin trembled with passion. "Sherry Gilstar!" he repeated. "What's — what's the meaning of this! Speak, Alice! What does this mean? You, sir, what are you doing here? How dare you send a strange man to my house to lure my daughter up here?"

"Now, please —" began Alice, trembling, but keeping her poise.

"I'm sorry, Deacon Bradshaw," said Sherry. "Perhaps I shouldn't have done it. I didn't mean to do anything that wasn't right. I've just come back to Tredick — and to tell you the truth, deacon, I wanted Alice to get me an interview with you — I didn't know how you'd feel about it if I saw you first —"

"Stop!" roared the deacon. "Not another word, while my daughter is here! Alice, Jud Williams drove me up here. His buggy is down at the road. You go get into it."

The girl reddened deeper than ever. She hesitated.

"Now, do be reasonable, father," she said, quietly. "You know I'm old enough to take care —"

"Alice, you will do what I say — at once!" was the reply. "I am in earnest. Immediately!"

There was no possible doubt that Deacon Bradshaw meant what he said. The sight of Sherry Gilstar seemed to have infuriated him — as though all the past galloped into his mind in a twinkling. The girl bowed her head. But, with her head bowed, she murmured to her companion, "Please be careful, now, Sherry." Then she walked down the road, with her head up, and passed out of sight beyond the underbrush.

First, the deacon turned to see that his daughter was out of hearing. Then, bitterly, almost with a snarl, he said to Sherry Gilstar. "Now, sir! What have you got to say for yourself? Why do you come sneaking back here to get my daughter into ill repute? Speak up, sir!"

The young fellow's fingers clenched involuntarily, and his jaw set firmly. It was only after a pause, during which he looked unflinchingly into the angry eyes before him, that he dared to speak. Then forcing a little smile he said, steadily, "I began to tell you why I had come back, Mr. Bradshaw, but you wouldn't let me. I'm sorry I asked Alice to see me. It was thoughtless. You must know it was the last thought I'd have, to cause her any trouble. I wanted to see her first because — because I thought she'd understand better than anybody else. I wanted to know how things stood here in Tredick, whether it would be all right for me to come home and go to work, at something."

But there was another awful fear running through the deacon's head, now. He scarcely gave attention to what Sherry Gilstar was saying, so violent was the assault this new suspicion, or dread, upon him.

"There can't be anything between my daughter and

you," the deacon wrenched out, as though every word cut him to the heart.

"I don't know what you mean by that," was the reply.

"Yes you do — you do — you're lying to me, Gilstar," groaned the father. "You — but no! You're wrong if you think a girl like Alice would stoop to notice a fellow like you — a soldier — a fellow who slinks away and doesn't dare show his head. It was sympathy — that was it! You worked on her sympathy."

Again the impetuous blood of the young fellow went almost out of control. But he shuddered and replied. "If you mean that I've always liked Alice, and she has always been a friend to me — yes," he said. "If you mean anything else — I don't think you ought to say those things to me. It isn't right to her, is it, Mr. Bradshaw?"

"Ha! Don't tell me what's right and what's wrong, Gilstar," was the savage answer. But evidently the shot went to the mark, for it had a quieting effect. There was a long pause. Then the deacon went on and grew calmer as he went on:

"Sherry, we won't waste any words. Granting your intentions are good, the best thing you could do would be to keep away. You're a deserter from the army, aren't you?"

The deacon thought he was making a shrewd guess. Sherry had to laugh inwardly at the knowing cock of the deacon's head, as he uttered the sage divination. "No, sir; I was honorably discharged. I'll show you my papers —"

"You needn't. Anyway, you've been up to no good, since then. If you had, you wouldn't come sneaking in the back door of Tredick. You'd walk in like a man — and the first person you'd see would be

your mother — and the next would be your aunt, or sister, or brother.”

Sherry Gilstar went white. It was a blow in the solar plexus. He knew there was truth in this. He hung his head and was silent.

“You haven’t cared enough about your family to show up here. Have you done anything to support your mother? Not a cent’s worth. If she hasn’t been in want, it isn’t your fault. Look at your brother Tom! There’s a boy to be proud of! A steady, hard-working fellow, with a level head — and we’ve made him constable, too. You could have had your rewards, too, if there’d been anything to you. No, sir; don’t tell me! The best thing you can do is to take to your tracks, back where you came from. And that fellow who came with you, too. Your mother and your aunt Prudence think that maybe you’re in the army yet, and maybe will be a hero some day. Ha! Hero! You better let them think so, hadn’t you?”

“Perhaps you’re right,” said Sherry, weakly.

“Yes, yes,” urged the deacon, quickly, taking advantage of the point. “If you’ve done anything you’re sorry for, Gilstar — and I guess there’s no doubt about that — you can sort of even things up by just staying away. Alice and I’ll say nothing about it.” Then into the deacon’s eyes there came a great blaze of shrewdness. “And you’d be doing your brother Tom a favor too. Tom’s doing well. He’s well liked. I like him. And that means, when I say I like him, that he’ll go far, Sherry. You don’t want to spoil it. I don’t say there’s likely to be anything between him and Alice, my daughter; I don’t say that; but if ever anything should come up, why, his family is just as good, *for all anybody knows now*, as the Bradshaws, and —”

It was the last straw. The young fellow couldn’t

possibly know that what the deacon was saying was merely in response to an idea that had been developing in the older man's mind, unbacked by any evidenced affection between the two persons in question. Sherry couldn't know that. So the thing hit him in the face, and sent him reeling backwards. Something in his head creaked and strained — he saw crimson and yellow flames. All the good resolutions he had made went into thin air.

Sherry was shaking a fist under the deacon's face. "All right," he yelled, harshly, and in a coarse manner that seemed new to him. "You've said something, deacon. I'll blow. To hell with the whole lot of you. I was crazy to think of coming back here, to associate with a bunch of hard-shelled suckers like you, anyway. I've got just one thing to say: if I hear that you've told anybody I've been here, I'll come back and make this town warm! Go ahead, now, beat it, deacon, before I forget you're the father of the finest girl that ever lived. I'll go; don't you worry."

The deacon went, not without turning several times anxiously, as he went down the path. But there was no danger. All he saw was a young man, crumpled up on the ground; and if he had been nearer, or had listened, intently, he could have heard the crumpled figure shaking with sobs.

Not a word passed between Deacon Bradshaw and his daughter until bed time that night. Then, as the girl said, faintly, "Good night, father," and started up stairs, he called her back.

"Alice," said the man, "I guess you'll agree with me that it would be better not to mention *this* to any one. Sherry's going to do what's best."

Her eyes were red and tired. "What's best?" she asked, tremulously. "You mean, he's going away again."

"Yes. He's got that much sense.—As I said, there won't be any need of mentioning that he's been here, will there? It wouldn't do anybody any good, would it?"

She stood there, pale, for a moment. Then she said, wearily, "You're right, father. It'll be best not to. Good night."

But Sherry's meeting with Hop Murray was not so placid. Hop had stayed away what he considered the proper length of time, and then he went over to the shack. Sherry was already there. He was sitting on the edge of the bunk.

"Say, Sherry!" was Hop's cheerful greeting. "Y' know, I kind of like this little burg of yours. I'm game to try it, a while. Maybe I'd decide to stay here."

"Stay here!" cried Sherry. "I wouldn't stay here for a million. I wouldn't be found dead here. Come on; I've been waiting for you. Every breath of this air makes me sick. We'll beat it on the first train."

Hop looked astounded. "Why, just now you said—" He stopped, catching sight of Sherry's face. "Oh," he said, "I get you. Your hopes have been croaked."

Sherry jumped up. "Listen, Hop," he said, "after now, this town is pickings for us. Get me? There's nothing doing for us in the straight line, kid; so we'll show 'em something the other way. Wait till we frame up something, as soon as we get back. We can walk in here, any time, and take their shirts. I've been listening to a lot of bunk about my brother Tom, Hop, it seems, he's the local hero! He's the cop we lamped last night, at the station. He's as big as a house, and he's as brave as a jack-rabbit. So help me, Hop, I don't want to knock my own folks, but we'll run up behind Tom some night, and smash a paper

bag, and send him to the hospital with shock. They been telling me what a lovely feller he is, and why don't I be like him. Come on. We've been smoking the wrong stuff. I feel like I'd had shot of dope under my skin, and it was just wearing off."

Hop hesitated. Sherry cried, roughly, "Well, stupid, what are you waiting for?"

"Don't get noisy, Sherry," he said, "I was just thinking, it was too bad to leave a place where they have fresh eggs like them I eat this morning."

VI

IT was the last day of March about noon, when a wagon drove up in front of the Gilstar house, and a young fellow, after removing the headstall from the horse, substituted therefor a halter and nose-bag, and hitched the animal to a post. Winter had not yet entirely disappeared from the roads. There was not only a white mantle of snow remaining on the hills surrounding Tredick, but the going was, as we say, good for neither "wheels nor runners." Lingered drifts alternated with stretches of sodden earth which, freezing lightly at night, thawed into mudholes in the sun; and as a result the peddler's wagon outside Mrs. Gilstar's was so plastered with accumulated mud that the fellies of the wheels were nowhere visible.

The wagon was a modern variant of one of those curious and interesting peddling carts which used to ply through the country. This one had a wagon box with a closed back, but on top were iron wash tubs, pots, kettles, brooms, wooden-ware, and even a roll of linoleum carpet.

Sam Greenberg, the owner of the traveling department store, opened the back of the cart, took out an aluminum double-boiler, and with it under his arm entered the house. Tom Gilstar had just arisen, and was splashing his face and hands in the ice-cold water of the kitchen sink. He turned as Sam Greenberg entered, and sputtered a greeting through his hands.

"Hello, mother," was the peddler's half-affectionate, half-bantering greeting to Mrs. Gilstar, as she

came out from the dining-room. "Here's something to cook your oatmeal in." He put the aluminum boiler on the back of the stove, as he spoke.

"Oh, Mr. Greenberg, I'm afraid—" began the gentle Mrs. Gilstar, whose weakness was that she did not know how to refuse to buy anything that was offered at her door.

"Oh, this is free, ma," said Sam quickly. "Just a little gift, that's all."

There came into the placid, patient eyes a little distressed look. "Oh, I mustn't take it, Mr. Greenberg," said Mrs. Gilstar. "You're all the time giving me things like this. I don't feel right about it, really. Because you won't let me give you your dinner, ever, without paying for it."

"Aw, forget it!" replied Sam. "I've got a right to blow myself now and then. It makes me feel like a millionaire. Besides, whenever a Jew peddler offers you something for nothing, you better take it and figure the poor boob has gone nutty."

As he spoke, Greenberg laughed. But it was not the whole-hearted laugh of a man really enjoying a joke. Something in his dark eyes shone with a certain defiance—as though an unjust accusation had to be refuted.

Any such inference as this never occurred to the innocent Mrs. Gilstar. She just stood there wondering whether she ought to accept the gift. But, from the doorway, Miss Prudence Perkins had heard the words. She stepped into the kitchen, saying:

"Don't you take it, Phœbe! Greenberg thinks we might think he's stingy, and he wants to show us he isn't."

Sam gazed at the spinster with real admiration. A little color came into his clean shaven cheeks, which looked dark-bluish from the heavy beard under the

skin. He shook his head and smiled. "Right there with the Sherlock Holmes stuff, as usual, Miss Perkins!" he exclaimed. "But, honest, this time you're wrong. No; I wasn't thinking of that. I really want ma to have the boiler. I'll tell you why. She makes me feel more like at home than any place I've ever been since I left home. Honest, you don't know how I look forward to getting here on Saturday, and spending Sunday. I don't know just what it is — somehow you treat a fellow like he was human. And then, the eats. Oh, my, the eats I get here! I begin to taste 'em on Wednesday before I strike Tredick. Is dinner most ready, Mrs. Gilstar? I'm as hungry as a hobo."

Prudence Perkins looked at the little dark fellow a moment. Then she said to her sister. "I believe he means it, Phœbe. You better accept the gift." And Mrs. Gilstar added, shyly:

"Thank you, Mr. Greenberg. Yes, we were all ready to eat when you drove up." By this time Tom was ready, and they all sat down to dinner.

"Had to kill any crooks yet, Tom?" asked Greenberg, jocularly. From having eaten at the Gilstar home and stopped over Sunday there for the past year, he seemed almost like one of the family.

For reply Tom grinned rather sheepishly. "No, not yet," he answered.

"Well, we may all have to get out our shooting irons pretty soon," added Sam, carelessly.

"You don't think — there's any possibility — of war — that is, our being involved in the war, do you?" asked Mrs. Gilstar. She looked upon Sam as a bit of an oracle, due to his itinerant life, and his New York freshness of manner.

"Oh, I was only kidding," Sam replied. "No, not a chance in the world. The Wall street crowd

wouldn't stand for it. They can make too much money by staying out and selling stuff to the poor sims on the other side. Gee, it gives me a headache, though, trying to keep up with prices. What d'y'e think? Common sheeting — common sheeting, mind you — I used to buy for —” And here Sam ran off into the intricacies of trade.

“Can you make as much as before the war — or more?” was Prudence's pointed question.

“Well, yes, Miss Perkins,” replied Sam. “People are buying more, because they've got more money. I think it's about an even break, though, now; and if prices go any higher, it won't look so good. By the way, Miss Perkins, I've been saving a nice piece of dress goods for you —”

“I don't want it,” interrupted Miss Perkins, on the defensive at once.

“Nobody ever wants anything till they see it,” replied Sam, mixing business with food without the slightest prejudice to either. “This is something extra fine, believe me. I'll make a price on it. It's a part of a job I picked up.”

“Don't want it. I've got too many clothes now.”

“But nothing like this. This goods will — well, it's a kind of *youthful* color and design,” said Sam, winking at Tom.

But the spinster merely grinned. “I want something to make me look older,” she parried. “I'm being mistaken for a school-girl right along.”

Sam Greenberg laughed heartily. “You're all right, Miss Perkins,” he said. “I hand it to you. Nothing gets by you. But, on the level, I want you to see this cloth.”

“Well, bring it in after dinner,” she said.

“The deacon dropped in this morning, Prudence,” said Mrs. Gilstar. “He told me to tell you that the

Universal Peace meeting is to be held Monday afternoon. He wants you to be sure to come — we're all going. I'm sure there'll be a great crowd there. It'll be exciting, won't it? It's too bad you can't stay to it, Mr. Greenberg."

"Yes, I know about it. I'll be there," replied Miss Perkins, with an inflection which was not understood at the time. "It ought to be interesting. I'm sure the country is waiting to hear what Tredick has to say on the subject. You better stay over, Greenberg."

"Couldn't do it."

"Well, I don't know. Maybe you can. You go and get that cloth now, and bring it in here so I can tell you I don't want it."

Sam brought in the dress-goods. But he didn't show them. Instead, when he entered the sitting-room, Miss Perkins waved him into a chair. Then she went over and closed the door, and sat down, and stared at the peddler with those hard eyes of hers. Sam, wondering, twiddled his fingers, nervously.

"Greenberg," said Prudence, suddenly, "why don't you open a store, instead of traipsing around the country with that horse and wagon? Haven't you got the money, yet?"

Sam returned the stare, now, with interest. A sardonic smile came on his heavy lips as he replied, "No, Miss Perkins."

"You haven't made much, peddling, then?"

"Oh, I've made enough, sure. But I haven't got it."

"Speculation? You don't gamble, do you?"

Sam shifted about uneasily. He didn't enjoy the cross-examination; and yet he was curious to find what was at the bottom of it. He knew Miss Perkins well enough to know that her interest was not idle.

"No," was the answer. Then Sam sat back in the chair, and looked at the ceiling, and whistled softly. Finally he said, "Listen, I'll tell you the truth; but I don't ask you to believe it. I would have had a store by this time, but I've been paying off a few bills."

"So you got into debt, eh?"

"Why, I didn't. The old man did. You see, my father was in the fur business, and he was making money, until he discovered that he was a philosopher. Sure, that's right. He found the business interfered with his reading, and thinking, so he gave less time to business and more time to a bunch of Yiddish philosophers with mattresses on their faces and, oi, oi, such a fine bunch of words! He might of stood that, too, but pretty soon he branched off into bum German philosophers — these guys that tell you that what you think ain't so, because you only think you think, and even if you do think, you're wrong, because you didn't start thinking at the right place, so you got to go back and think all over again, and be wrong some other way. Pretty soon, the old man paid forty cents on the dollar and woke up. He's working for the kid that used to run errands for him, now. And — well, that's all."

"You don't mean to say you've been helping him pay up?" said Prudence with a new and different interest.

"I wouldn't tell you that, because you wouldn't believe it," was the ironic answer.

"Well, see if I believe it. Is that so?"

"Yes," replied Sam, after hesitating.

"I believe it, Greenberg. Huh! Well! — Had you any idea that a good dry-goods and notion store might be started here in Tredick?"

"Had I?" answered Sam, giving voice to a feeling he had been nourishing hopelessly for a long time.

"Say, Miss Perkins, when I heard Deacon Bradshaw had bought in the Williams store, I nearly turned green. I wanted that place myself. But I —"

"Wait a minute, Greenberg. That's what I'm getting at. The deacon has bought out the Williams store. But he don't know anything about the business, and he won't spend any money to make a good store of it. Now, I've got a vacant store in my block, you know. It's situated just right for a live, up-to-date store. How would you like to open, there?"

"Well, I told you —"

"I know you did. But I thought I might make a little investment myself. I've been watching you, Greenberg, for a long time. I guess you're honest. And you know something about the business —"

"Do I?" exclaimed Sam, with enthusiasm. "Say, Miss Perkins, if I do say it, I can pick up jobs where there ain't any. Last week —"

Miss Perkins rose, as though she had made up her mind. She looked around cautiously, and then said, "You better come over to the block, to my office. There's nobody to hear us over there. The deacon! Huh! We will show him."

The Perkins Block was the newest and best business structure in Tredick. It was a three-story building, of brick, with three stores on the street floor, small business offices on the second, and a large hall, commonly known as "Perkins Hall" on the third. One of the stores on the ground floor had not been rented, and it was this one that the canny business woman intended to set at work in her own behoof. The offices upstairs were fully occupied, one of them by Miss Perkins herself, and it was to this modern little room, neatly furnished with up-to-date business appliances, that the queerly assorted pair adjourned.

"When I get an idea, I like to see it right through,"

explained Miss Perkins, "so we may as well thresh out the thing here. The first thing you want to do, Greenberg, is to inventory your outfit. My idea is to incorporate, and take an even number of shares. I'll lend you, on your note, six per cent., enough money to buy your half, if you need it. What's a good name for a store? We want something catchy — something like 'The Fifth Avenue.' Or 'The White Way.'"

"'The Fifth Avenue' — that's a peach of a name," assented Sam.

"Well, it'll bear thinking of." Miss Perkins had no ideas that were not subject to this qualification — that they would bear thinking of. "Now," she went on briskly, "you better think it all over to-morrow, and Monday we can draw up papers. If it looks all right to you, we'll put a big advertisement in the Tredick paper next Thursday, announcing our opening. We'll put two pages — in big type."

"Two pages — whew!" uttered Greenberg. But he nodded, afterward, in approval. "That'll knock 'em cold," he said.

"We won't need that horse and wagon, I figure," went on Miss Perkins. "It don't pay to make deliveries here — at least, not now. How much do you put that horse in at?"

"Why, a hundred dollars," answered Sam.

"A hundred dollars!" was the shrill retort. "I guess not, Greenberg. I hope you didn't pay a hundred dollars for that skate."

"That's a pretty good horse, Miss Perkins," said Sam. "I paid eighty-five dollars for her, honest."

"Well, you got stuck," was the cold answer. "You can put her in at sixty. You know that's enough. The wagon you can sell for what you can get. Of course, you'll draw a salary in the store; and if I work there helping out on Saturdays or special times, it's

understood I draw, too. We'll arrange those details later."

Sam Greenberg sat back and gazed at the angular spinster with unconcealed admiration. He understood perfectly, now, why it was that she was the richest person in the county. She didn't miss a point. When she approached a business deal like this, she was as prepared for the details as though she were reading from a stenographic copy. "You're a wonder, Miss Perkins," he gasped. "I thought I had some pep, myself. I guess I'm the piker, after all."

"Thanks," she replied, dryly. "But don't under-rate yourself. You'll carry the weight of the firm, remember. I've got other irons in the fire."

There was a light knock on the door. Miss Perkins looked a little annoyed at the interruption. Then she laid a warning finger on her lips, looking at Sam, and cried, "Come in!"

It was Prof. George Watling Wenham, principal of the Tredick Academy. The professor was a heavily set man, whose torso was built somewhat after the plan of an egg, with the heavy end down. That is, he carried a good deal of weight around the waist, and ran up to a point at the top, having a phenomenally narrow and thin chest, and not a very large head. Half of Mr. Wenham's head was bald, about back to his ears, and the rest of his head was prolific of black hair, which he allowed to grow long in the rear. He wore thick spectacles, and his nose was sharp and inquiring as though he had spent all his life scenting errors in grammatical construction. Finally, the professor was oratorically given. He spoke in large sentences, almost perorations; and these would have been more effective had he not some time acquired a painful habit of stopping midway in a sentence to reflect and emit an "um-hah!"

"I beg your pardon," began Mr. Wenham, looking curiously at Sam Greenberg. "But I called to get the key to your hall, upstairs. Deacon Bradshaw has informed me — um-hah! — that you have donated it for the Universal Peace meeting, on Monday afternoon."

"Is that so?" replied the spinster, sarcastically. "It's the first I've heard of it. Deacon Bradshaw has misinformed you, professor. My price for the use of the hall is ten dollars."

"But the deacon said you'd be there, and sit on the platform, and — um-hah! — we thought that your natural interest in Universal Peace would — um-hah! — naturally prompt you —"

"I told the deacon I'd be there," responded Miss Perkins crisply. "I did not tell him I would sit on the platform. I shall sit in the audience. And the hall will cost you ten dollars." She took a key from her desk, as she spoke.

"The purpose of the meeting is purely philanthropic," went on Mr. Wenham. "There will be no collection. Therefore, Miss Perkins — knowing your reputation for benevolence —"

"I have no reputation for benevolence," was the reply. "The price of the hall will be ten dollars. Now, look here, Mr. Wenham, if you think Universal Peace is worth ten dollars to you, rent my hall. If it isn't, rent or borrow some other hall."

Miss Perkins paused, and softened her voice a little. Then she went on, "I don't want to seem harsh or niggardly, Professor Wenham. I suppose you're entirely sincere in holding this meeting. But it looks to me like vanity speaking, and not common-sense, when you go shouting about Universal Peace just now. Do you want to hire the hall?"

The professor looked dazed for a moment. Then he slowly took a wallet from his pocket, removed a ten-

dollar bill from it, and laid it on the desk. With the key in his hand, he sought the door; but he turned to remark:

"I had thought that you were one of us, Miss Perkins. I'm dumbfounded."

"One of you? I don't know what you mean by one of you. If you mean that I'd like to see an end to war — all war, and everybody peaceable and minding his own business, and a spirit of common honesty and decency all over the universe — of course I'm one of you. But if you mean that you want to dodge all the responsibilities that life is putting on us — and to meet this crisis with prayer and petitions — I'm not with you — I'm against you. I want to see fire fought with fire, and a burglar fought with a rifle, and a murderer killed before he murders innocent people. You show me, professor, that there's no longer any danger or fire in the world, or anybody who covets somebody else's goods, or anybody with murderous instincts, and I'll jubilate with you. In fact, I'll donate my hall for a real bona fide Universal Peace meeting."

The egg-shaped instructor of youth groped through the doorway and was gone.

"They make me tired, Greenberg," explained Prudence. "Instead of whining about Universal Peace, they'd better be cleaning their muskets, or the first thing they know they won't be here to talk about peace or anything else."

Sam Greenberg had been enjoying the colloquy hugely. His admiration grew in proportion to the length of time he was associated with Miss Perkins. Now he laughed and replied, with a queer, facetious mimicking of the older generation of New York Jews, "Oi, oi, Miss Perkins, what chance has a poor innocent Jew peddler got in partnership with a fine business lady like you?"

It was seldom that Prudence Perkins laughed outright. But the words, and particularly the tone of lamentation in which they were uttered, made her sit down and shake with laughter. Then, as if ashamed of herself for giving way to such undignified mirth, she followed by looking unusually sober and severe. Her eyes fixed upon Sam Greenberg, and she kept them there while she reflected, silently. Finally she said, thoughtfully:

"Greenberg, I think we shall get along very well. You'll find that I do just as I say I will; and if I didn't think you were honest, I wouldn't go into business with you. Now, I've talked a good deal today, and I don't want you to think I'm a garrulous old woman, for I'm not. But I'd like to say one thing more, on the personal side, and I hope you'll take it in good part."

"Sure!" nodded Sam.

"In the first place, Greenberg, there's a certain freshness and flipness about you that — it isn't exactly unpleasant, because you're polite with it all — and being new to Tredick, a little of it will give you a personality here. I'd just suggest that you kind of tone it down. Some of the old folks here wouldn't understand it, and you'd lose by it. But there's another thing more important. I've often noticed, Greenberg, that you affect to sneer at your own people. I don't think you really think badly of them — I think it's just a kind of bravado, or something. Now I don't know anything about Jews — we never saw many of them here in Tredick — but I imagine they're a good deal like any other people — good, bad, and indifferent. Personally, Greenberg, I don't care whether you're a Jew or a Turk or a Hottentot, as long as you're square and above-board. But I don't think you can gain the good opinion of anybody by making fun

of your own people, or belittling them.—However, this is none of my business, and I'll say no more about it. Perhaps I'd better have kept my ideas to myself."

Sam Greenberg did not answer for a long while. He looked out the window, drummed on the slide of the desk and twirled his watch-chain. At first he had grinned in a rather superior way; but something wiped the grin from his face while Prudence was talking. At last he rose from the chair and extended his hand. Miss Perkins merely looked at the hand for a moment, not comprehending what was in his mind. He said:

"I want to thank you, Miss Perkins. You did jolt me a little. I'm sensitive — perhaps that's at the bottom of it all. A fellow that's sensitive sometimes makes a lot of fool talk to try to hide it. I'll remember what you said; and I'll never forget the way you handed it to me, either.— I hope we'll do business together. It'll be an education for me."

"Pshaw!" said Miss Perkins, deprecatingly.

Nevertheless she shook hands. Then, as if to make up for any possible loss of prestige, she summarily dismissed the young man from the office, telling him to take his inventory and think it over.

VII

At half-past two on Monday afternoon, the second day of April, Deacon Bradshaw ordered Tom Gilstar to close the doors of Perkins Hall, and to appease the wrathful citizens who couldn't get in, but stood packed on the stairways and formed a long queue that stretched the length of the block, by telling them that there would be an overflow meeting on the Common, immediately after the hall-meeting was finished.

Judging from the crowd, its numbers and seriousness, there was a well defined interest in Universal Peace, in Tredick and surrounding towns. Nobody could recall such a spontaneous outpouring of people, to a meeting whose appeal was purely mental; that is to say, where there was no wheedling side-issue of acrobats, Swiss bell-ringers or balloon-and-parachute jumping.

The fact that it was a fine clear Spring day had something, of course, to do with it. So did the fact that a half-holiday had been declared, for the school children. But there was something else that clearly lay back of the interest in Universal Peace. There was none of the gossipy, giggly undertone of conversation, common to most mass meetings. The farmers had driven in, some of them eight miles or more, with a sober purpose which was manifest on their faces. There was no possible doubt what was in their minds. They had come to hear peace declared. The sickening revulsion from newspaper horrors, day after day, was ready now to cry aloud for an end — any end — to the slaughter. That, no doubt. But something else,

which no man or woman, and hardly a child above twelve years old had failed to feel — a sense of impending danger, a vague fear that somehow the Evil Thing was approaching Tredick; that not even those high hills would avail to keep it out. There was no question but that Tredick was awakening.

And, as you watched those men and women, and boys and girls filing silently into the hall, you were impressed by certain aspects of Tredick humanity. Remember, that Tredick's people were of what we call "the old stock." Their ancestors were those who had battled with Indians, with the elements, with disease, to keep their footing on the new soil. It developed a race that was muscular, angular, sharp-voiced and thin. They were sturdy, self-reliant, and courageous because they had to be; no others could live.

Now, here were the same faces, in essential features; no mistaking that. But something had happened to the Tredick physique. Not merely that the present generation averaged a few inches less in stature than the early one — though as a matter of fact it did — but it carried its body in a different way. The men of middle age walked as though they were tired and disappointed — and considerably overfed. Far readier of tongue, and probably quicker of wits than their grandfathers, they seemed to have added a fatal something to their waist-lines, or their souls, or to both, which was sapping the old rugged self-dependence.

The high-school boys were clean looking boys. But they walked into the hall with a slouching gait, and when they sat down, they sprawled. Foot-ball, base-ball, none of the common sports seemed to have had the effect of producing a pair of squared-off shoulders and a well-poised head. And curiously enough — nobody in Tredick ever commented on this fact.

However — the meeting is ready to begin.

On the platform sits, besides Chairman Deacon Charles Bradshaw, the principal speaker of the afternoon, Prof. George Watling Wenham. Deacon Bradshaw and Professor Wenham are whispering a good deal together, and making a mysterious display of a sheaf of typewritten sheets of paper, clipped together. Also, on the platform, is Wells Hardy in a stiff shirt, who looks decidedly as though he ardently longed to be in the audience; Fred Payne, in ditto, who looks ditto; the venerable Samuel McReady, pastor of the Baptist church; the youthful Rev. Francis Hodge Petrie, pastor of the Congregational church; also one or two estimable but lesser lights of Tredick. You would say that this crew was, in respectability, fully qualified to sit on this platform, or any other platform, and you would say truly.

In the audience, on the left, we espy several faces well known to us. Mrs. Gilstar, Dorothy Gilstar, Tom's sister, Antonia Pillicy and Alice Bradshaw, all in a row. The white-bearded little man just back of them, and in company with a buxom elderly matron with a red face, is Henry Hobgood, postmaster. Just at his right are Harry Upton and Matt Pillicy. On the other side, not far from the rear exit, sits Miss Prudence Perkins, very quiet, very serious, with tight lips and roving, determined eyes. At the end of that same row of seats is Sam Greenberg, looking bored to death when he isn't smiling sardonically at some farmer who is clothed entirely from a catalogue-house in Chicago.

Following a short, earnest prayer by the aged Samuel McReady (the dear old man was a million miles distant in his mind from any war, and prayed just as earnestly for Tredick's soul, as though Tredick wasn't at the moment wondering whether anything was going to happen to its skin), Deacon Bradshaw arose. He

regarded his fellow citizens solemnly for half a minute before he spoke. Then he uttered these words.

“War is a terrible thing!”

It was a sentence that admitted of no argument; it found agreement in every present heart. And for that reason, and because the deacon paused a long time after the utterance, there were many in the audience who were affected almost to tears. On the platform, the little semi-circle shook their heads in woeful unison. Young Mr. Petrie shook his head less than the others; but, suddenly perceiving that the Reverend McReady was still shaking his head, Mr. Petrie began to shake *his* some more — whether out of respect for the advanced age of his companion, or because he was unwilling to be outshaken by another sect, one may guess.

Having outlined the general program of the afternoon, Deacon Bradshaw introduced Prof. George Watling Wenham, after specifically declaring that that gentleman needed no introduction. Whereupon, the egg-shaped figure of the Academy principal walked forward upon the platform, and lifted a hand. There was an instant hush.

Now, it isn't worth while to report at any length what Professor Wenham said. He spoke too long, like most people who speak; he used too many un-hahs to bracket his neatly rounded periods; and long before he finished there were many who had a disturbing, twitching sense that they were buying Universal Peace at a steep price, if the professor was a purveyor of it. But it is worth while to note the general tenor of what he had to say.

The professor being an avowed Pacifist, he felt it necessary to absolve Germany, as far as possible, from any special guilt. Obviously this was necessary, because the moment you admit that Germany, or any other country, had any special blood-guiltiness or evil

intentions, you ruin the Pacifist argument, and make preparation for war an imperative duty. So Professor Wenham, like several thousand other gentlemen of his kind, proceeded to show how diabolical every other country had been, including his own. He spoke of the abominable treatment of the Indians; he spoke of "a damnable unjust war with Mexico" and of "a capitalistic war to despoil Spain." He did not speak of the fact that, in later years, bad though his American people might be, they had been trying to do the square thing by the Indians, had tried to treat Mexico in an idealistic way; had been the only country to put forth a helping hand to China; had blundered along, as a great mass of people must blunder along, trying to be fair, and generous and clean.

Of the horrors committed in Belgium and Northern France, the professor said only that they were the usual accompaniment of war—and in this he lied—though he may not have meant to lie—for so acted never an American regiment in warring upon a civilized and defenseless people.

Of the "capitalists"—those who are supposed to force all wars for their profit and sport—the professor spoke at length and scathingly. He did not explain how men of wealth could enjoy a war which only destroyed wealth.

Of soldiers, the professor had a contempt and a hate. He said they were simply hired assassins, because there never was a just war. With this airy indictment, he dismissed the Revolution, the War of 1812 and the Civil War, not to speak of the wars that achieved Magna Charta, and the French Revolution.

Enough! The idea was simple. "We have here to-day," said the professor, "a document which I shall hereafter read." And it was thereafter read.

And there sat Tredick, uneasy Tredick, poor, won-

dering, dizzy Tredick, listening, striving to believe, trying to put away reason and the sense of honor, trying to believe in a Peace which no longer could exist, because a warlike and conquering country had made it impossible to exist. There sat poor Tredick, listening to the words of an egg-shaped man who was telling it what it wanted to hear, and was secretly ashamed of wanting to hear!

There was no applause; no enthusiasm; it was funereal. It was a meeting of people who wanted Universal Peace, because they wanted peace in Tredick.

There, in Perkins Hall, spoke an egg-shaped man, with a sharp nose, a verb-hunting nose, telling seven hundred people that they had no honor worth defending; that they had no right to the use of the seas, if that right were denied by a stronger people; that they had never had any honor worth defending, and that their fathers had stained their hands in the blood of innocents; that the finest thing in the world is peace, no matter how it is obtained, no matter how impotent and flabby and soulless it may render the possessor.

And to this end Tredick was asked to subscribe to the ensuing declaration, a Declaration of Peace, which Professor Wenham with tremendous appreciation (it was his own production) now read:

“WHEREAS, most of the countries of Europe are involved in a bloody and terrible war, which we believe to have been avoidable but for the machinations of kings and militarists and the sowing of seeds of hate among various peoples; and,

“WHEREAS, the danger of the United States being drawn into this conflict seems to grow greater every day, with each new event; and

“WHEREAS, we, the people of Tredick, in mass-meeting assembled, believe it to be the duty of the

United States, to its own citizens and the cause of Universal Brotherhood, not to become involved in this war: therefore be it

“RESOLVED, that it is the spirit of this meeting that our country should be kept out of the War at all costs, even at the expense of foregoing any and all rights we may have as a sovereign people (inasmuch as we can assume these rights again after the war), and that we do nothing from this time forth that could possibly bring us into conflict with any foreign country, and that we propose our willingness to submit any question to arbitration, and that we do not prepare in any way for war, because preparation for war will lead to war, and that we take any and all other measures to avoid war; and be it further

“RESOLVED, that a copy of this Declaration of Peace by the people of Tredick be sent to the President of the United States and to all members of Congress, asking them to do all in their power to keep the United States from the horrors of war.

(Signed by the manhood and womanhood of Tredick.) April 2, 1917.”

Following the reading of this remarkable declaration there was a dull silence. A few hands were clapped; there was an animated whispering. But whatever affirmation there was, was cold and reserved. For, even though they craved peace, there was a subtle sense of shame sitting heavily upon Tredick's soul. They would subscribe to this enslavement, but they could not be happy in doing so!

“I am going to ask all those who favor this declaration to raise—” began Professor Wenham. But he was interrupted.

“I want that read again, slowly and clearly!” cried a voice from the back of the hall. Every pair of eyes

turned to the place whence that voice came. And they saw, standing, her eyes glistening with suppressed passion, her pale, thin cheeks flushed, her hand unconsciously outstretched toward the platform, Miss Prudence Perkins.

Professor Wenham glanced toward the figure, and his face showed clear annoyance. Nevertheless, he could scarcely find reason for not complying with the request. He read the resolutions once more. Then added, addressing Prudence in a smooth tone, "I trust our worthy friend does not object to the phraseology of this — um-hah — document?"

She paid no attention to him. Instead, she swept her hand around, pointing from one side of the hall to the other, and choked out:

"Do you understand, folks? Do you understand what that all means? Are you going to put up your hands and consent to a cowardly, miserable document like that, going out of here as the belief and the purpose of this town? Are you so anxious for peace that you're willing to grovel in the dirt to get it? Do you want to give up every right you have in the world for the sake of living your little sleek, self-satisfied lives until they plant you up in the church graveyard? Maybe you think that you can give up your rights in a crisis like this, and then get them back again when it all blows over. You're mistaken, folks! You can't do it. Let me tell you something: down on the corner of Parker street, I've got a vacant lot. There's a path across it, and Henry Moorhead used that path to get back and forth from his house. That's what they call in law, an 'easement.' Henry had used that road for years, and I can't stop him now, even if I want to. But just let Henry give up that right for a while, and he'll never get it back again.

Ah-hah, Henry, you know that well enough, don't you?" said Prudence, pointing at Mr. Moorhead, not far away. "Well, you give up *any* right, and see whether you get it back again — without fighting for it!"

The crowd was watching the woman curiously, wondering. Something told them that she had hold of a fundamental truth — and yet, Tredick wanted peace — ah, so badly! It had built a little quiet nest for itself, and it was, ah, so happy in it! Miss Perkins was telling them the truth, perhaps — but Professor Wenham was telling them what they wanted to be true. It was so much nicer to be at peace with everybody!

"Perhaps I can explain to Miss Perkins," said the egg-shaped man, rubbing his hands with that peculiar pleasure of a man who is about to say the final, crushing, all-inclusive thing. "We understand, Miss Perkins, that if this country — our very soil — should be invaded, we should all fly to arms as one man. Then, of course, we would make the invader feel the force of our arms, we would show then what a loyal people can do in self-defense. We —"

"Would you, now?" asked the spinster. "I want to know, professor! I'd really like to be there to see you leading this mighty army of Tredick, armed with scythes, revolutionary muskets and tin horns! Do you know, sir, that in the Revolutionary War, they had to threaten the loyal self-defenders — the militia — with shooting in the back, to keep them from running away from the British and Hessians? Read what George Washington wrote about them! Do you know, Professor Wenham, that in the War of 1812, those same fellows that flew to arms, as you say, ran like rabbits, when they outnumbered the British near Washington? If you don't know, you'd better find out, sir. No,

professor, all you'd be good for in a case like that, would be as a target. Or they might use you to wave the white flag!"

"You insult me!" gasped the man on the platform, glowing like fire, in the face.

"I — I didn't mean to. I beg your pardon — really I do," replied Miss Perkins, quickly. "No, professor, I think you'd be as brave — and as useless — as any of the rest of them, if trouble came to us. I didn't mean to insult you. But perhaps you don't know, sir, that you when you wrote that set of resolutions, you insulted every decent-hearted American that ever drew the breath of life! And, sir, I do mean that!"

But the apology failed to appease the man on the platform. He was deeply wounded. Furthermore, the meeting was on the verge of disaster — he could see that. The people were stretching their necks; that innate love of a fight was seeping through to the surface; and the Universal Peace advocates were facing that distressingly comic event which has so often taken place — a peace meeting ending in a row. Something had to be done at once, to shut off this obstructor. In a voice that fairly oozed with sarcasm, the professor looked straight at Miss Perkins and said:

"I think we all love and honor the good sister who had just spoken; and I think we all understand the reason she takes the stand she does. She would no doubt feel far differently if she had a son, of military age, to be taken and swept into this horrible welter of blood and corpses."

At the words, the breath seemed to go out of the body of the thin, pale woman who was still standing in her place. She winced as though a brutal hand had smitten her in the face. Some of those around her heard her utter a plaintive little "oh!" — and they saw her tremble, and swallow convulsively. She wavered,

unsteadily, for a moment; tried to smile; swept the back of her gloved hand across her eyes swiftly. Then, in a low, unsteady voice, she replied:

"Yes; it is true — I have no son — to give. It is true — I have never known the joys of motherhood — you need not be disquieted, Professor Wenham — you haven't hurt my feelings any more — than Life has hurt my — heart. You couldn't be expected to know that — a woman — though she never may have a child — to give to her country — is still — down deep — somewhere — a mother — with the feelings of a mother. She knows something of what that feeling is — she pours forth some of that feeling on — other women's children — or even a dog — or even a cat — or she may even have a country she loves. Yes; Professor Wenham — even *that*.

"But — you are right. I have no son — of military age. I have nothing but myself — a poor, unhappy old woman who has nothing to look forward to except making money and more money. I have no right to speak. I'll not say any more. — But, thank God, *I have something to give!* You don't know what you've done for me, Professor Wenham! I can never thank you enough. You've — given back my soul — it was nearly dead — like yours — like Tredick's! I see it clearly now. I —"

Prudence Perkins, tall, thin, angular, sallow of cheek, stood there a moment. Her hands were clasped in front of her. Two great wet places glistened on her cheeks. But, upon her face and in her eyes, there shone a sunlight of sheer joy, something unworldly, beyond words, that none in that audience had ever seen on any face, unless upon the face of a mother, with a little speck of humanity cuddled to her breast.

There was not a word. Slowly, even with a little "Pardon me, please!" to those whom she had to dis-

turb, to gain the aisle, the old woman walked out of the hall with vigorous steps and her head thrown back. The people looked at one another. On the platform Deacon Bradshaw tugged at Wenham's coat, and whispered something to him. But the first words that were uttered came from a young fellow who had been sitting in the same row with Miss Perkins — and who now rose. He said, in what he meant to be an undertone to his neighbor, but which smote every ear in the hall, "That's good enough for me. To hell with Universal Peace!"

Only three or four persons recognized the speaker, he was gone so quickly. It was Sam Greenberg.

A few men in the back rows sneaked out, probably without any more definite notion than that they were afraid the meeting was going to be a failure, and they didn't want to be identified with it.

But Prof. George Watling Wenham was equal to the occasion. He cried, "My friends, we forgive Sister Perkins freely. She was excited, possibly hysterical. But the purpose of this meeting is to pass resolutions of peace. Do you want war or do you want peace? Do you want WAR or do you want PEACE? Now is the time to speak. The chamber of horrors is yawning for your young men — cannon-fodder — victims of blood-lust! Are you going to declare for bloodshed, or for the white dove of brotherhood? Now is the time to speak! All those in favor of the declaration you have heard read, hold up your right hands. Up! Higher. So we can count 'em!"

Hands went up. But there was another slight interruption. Joe Capodilupo, the Italian cobbler, had a question. Joe was only twenty-two years old, but with a keenness to gain knowledge. "It's-a all-arighta, professore," he cried, "but dat lady just a-spoke, I t'ink she meant-a somet'ing lika dis; you may be a fina

fella, all righta, want to maka dis peace, but how about de odder fella? S'pose he coma to knocka your block off? How you going hava peace if odder fella knock-a your block, hey?"

"Sit down, Joe!" shouted somebody, and Joe, embarrassed, sat down. Not before Professor Wenham, however, had cast a withering look of contempt at him.

"All those opposed to these resolutions!" shouted the professor.

And not a hand went up! Not one hand in Tredick went up. It may be that there were hands that would have liked to go up—it may be. Then they must have been faltering, hedging hands, that never do go up except with the majority. Up in the church graveyard, there must have been a turning of bones. For there were buried in Tredick graveyard at least two men who had sailed the seas under the American captains who made the seas safe for Americans, in long years past.

"The resolutions are carried unanimously!" announced Professor Wenham, with an expansive smile. "Tredick, at least, has made its Declaration of Peace. Tredick holds out a hand of brotherhood to the nations! Now; please, all come to the platform and sign these petitions to the President and the Congress!"

Well, there was nothing worse that Tredick could do; so they did that. Not with any joy out of that passionate desire—not for peace, for there was no peace, and they knew it—but to bring back the peace that was—that sleepy peace of self-content that was Tredick—they signed their names.

It was the second day of April, 1917. On the same day, at almost the same hour, that Tredick was making its Declaration of Peace, the President of the United

States appeared before the American Congress, and asked for a declaration of war against the Imperial German Government.

VIII

"WE are at war!" gasped Tredick — and then began to pinch itself, so to speak, to come to a better realization of what War would mean to Tredick. The news that a state of war had been declared did not surprise Tredick. It rather annoyed Tredick; it rather scared Tredick; it certainly dazed Tredick — but there was no genuine feeling of surprise. How could there be? Tredick, sleepy as it was, had ordinary intelligence; and when Tredick really had to think, it could think. So Tredick had known all along, in that deep-set nerve of understanding which every human being possesses, that war would come. Tredick talked peace; but it knew better. In its own narrow experience, it knew that when there was a murderer, or a band of murderers at large, it was useless to talk peace till either Murder or Justice held the field, unchallenged by the other.

Tredick talked no more of Universal Peace after the second of April. In fact, in those first days of April, Tredick assumed a very patriotic attitude. "We thought Peace best," said Tredick, "but our President has spoken for War. We are Americans. We obey our superiors. Woe to the enemy! Let the enemy beware of America's legions!"

It did not occur to Tredick that America had no legions — that America's legions were yet on paper, as were her guns, and her merchant ships, and nearly everything else that was necessary to carry woe to any enemy. But more important, it did not occur to Tredick that Tredick would have much to do, anyway,

in the matter. Tredick said Tredick was patriotic; Tredick would certainly wish the United States well in any venture. And Tredick expressed the generous hope that it would soon be over. Having made these patriotic concessions, Tredick settled down to go to sleep again.

"There'll be something coming to the Germans!" said Wells Hardy, coming down to his Cash Market on the morning of April 3, to find out that it looked just the same as when he had locked up the night before. And then Wells Hardy immersed himself in the knotty problem of how to collect a bill from a person who really had no money.

Harry Upton owned the harness-shop, by the bridge. Harry said, with great enthusiasm, "Wait till America gets going. She'll show 'em." And therefore, confident that America would take care of everything, Harry devoted all his time, as usual, to showing a balance on the right side of the ledger, and buying hides to store against higher prices.

Deacon Bradshaw was hurt, deeply hurt, at the precipitate action of the government. The Government at Washington had not given Tredick's Declaration of Peace a chance to arrive. In a quiet private talk with Professor Wenham, the two gentlemen agreed that America was making a huge mistake — but they also agreed that it was no use to do anything about it now, and that it behooved all good citizens to support the Government. Having declared his loyalty thus, the deacon devoted all his time to the intricacies of the dry-goods business, as he had bought and reopened the Williams Dry-Goods Store; and Professor Wenham went into a sort of intellectual ambush, from which, now and again, he sniped a little in the interest of Universal Brotherhood, with a sort of smokeless powder which did not betray his position. You will recall

that nearly all the pacifists did this — and continue to do it.

Yes; it was hard to believe, after all, that the United States was at war. The trains arrived just as late, but not later, than usual; the clock in the woolen mill struck the hours just the same; and the steeple on the Congregational Church leaned nor-nor'west, as it always had. Those big hills around Tredick loomed just as protecting as ever. Out in Tredick fields you could hear the first venturesome bees zooming over the first eager flowers — no sound of cannon, no bugles, no rattle of small-arms. Was this really war?

The draft bill was passed by Congress. "Conscription" — the ugly word, the sound of which had caused riots sixty years before — settled placidly down upon a placid country, and woke Tredick up for a while. But the mere word "conscription" did not seem to be very dangerous, so Tredick fell dozing again.

Then the Government asked for seven billions of dollars, with which to conduct the war — a little while. Tredick was dazzled by the sum, but as it is no harder to visualize seven billions than one billion, Tredick was not unduly impressed. But when the first Liberty Loan was actually to be floated, Tredick began to sit up and look about. The War was becoming serious.

Prudence Perkins walked into the Bank one morning in May and called Harold Stenner, the managing cashier, aside. "I suppose you are going to push that loan as hard as you can," she said.

"Why, the government asks us to, and I want to do what I can," replied Stenner, who was a bright, energetic young fellow. "You were at the stockholders' meeting, Miss Perkins, and you know what the bank itself plans to take. But, to tell you the truth, I can't get up much interest among the merchants. I've talked it over a good deal. Deacon Bradshaw — well,

I've no right to say anything — but you heard what he said at the stockholders' meeting. He said he personally wouldn't go down for a cent's worth. He said he wasn't going to take money that he could get five and six per cent. for, and put it out at three and a half."

"I guess I'd better go right over and see him now," said Prudence. She found him in the rear of the dry-goods store.

The deacon looked up mournfully, and his face became more mournful and injured as he saw who it was. Before Prudence could tell her errand, he moaned, "It's terrible, terrible! What have I done! I knew I shouldn't have done it. I had no right fooling with such a store, anyway!"

"What are you talking about, anyway?" asked Prudence, who knew well enough.

The deacon pointed miserably across the street toward the Perkins Block. "Look over there — you know well enough — you rented to him!" groaned Mr. Bradshaw. "Greenberg has started a dry goods store over in your block. And you advised me to buy this place! You advised me to! And I said I wouldn't touch it except for the good will, and no opposition!"

"Advised you to buy this store! I did nothing of the kind, Charles Bradshaw," was the reply.

"You said — well, you said if you acted on your impulse, you'd buy it. Those were your words, Prudence. I trusted you."

"Well, I did say that," admitted Prudence, with a smile that couldn't be suppressed. "But *I* never act on impulses. You ought to have known that."

The deacon looked at her with sharp suspicion. He hoarsed out, "You had rented it to that Jew at the time."

"No, I hadn't — honestly," replied the old woman.

She gazed upon the shrinking, discomfited figure with contempt -- and yet, now, in her glance there was something of kindness that was new to her. "Cheer up, Charles!" said Prudence, suddenly, patting the man on the shoulder. "I don't believe for a minute there isn't room for two good stores here. Don't get down in the mouth too soon. Don't cry before you're hurt. — Come, Charles, we're in the midst of bigger things than dry-goods stores. What's a dry-goods store — what are you — what am I — in times like this? Do you know what I'm doing? I'm out working for the Liberty Loan. I'm over here, Charles, to get your promise —"

"No, no, I can't do it!" the man panted, as though he were being pursued. "I — I can't. This loss, in this store — I know I can't make it go — I feel it — only for that, maybe, I'd put in a few hundred —"

"A few hundred!" cried the spinster, scornfully. "A few hundred! You ought to be ashamed, Charles Bradshaw —" She stopped suddenly, with tight lips, as though she had resolved newly against bitterness. In a gentler tone she added, "Well, Charles, I suppose it's as one sees it. Perhaps, later you'll see reasons for changing your mind."

With that, Prudence went over to Wells Hardy. He was trimming meat when she came in. He laid down his knife respectfully and put his hands akimbo. "Wells," began Miss Perkins, "I ran in just to talk with you about the Liberty Loan —" She got no farther.

"Oh, good Lord!" exclaimed Mr. Hardy, with an air of resignation, "don't pester me any more about that, please, Miss Perkins. Stenner was in yesterday. I simply can't do it. I'm all tied up — a lot of money out — bad bills — you know it isn't all velvet. —"

"Yes, I know that, Wells," she replied. "But,

Wells, this isn't something in the regular line of business. This isn't something you would do because it gets the most money. Wells, this is a time for sacrifice, isn't it? You know the Government has got to get the money. We can't send an army to Europe and leave the boys in the lurch. How will you feel, when Herbert, over there, is fighting —"

Prudence had gestured slightly toward a strapping, healthy young fellow at the back of the store. It was Hardy's son.

The hands came down from Wells Hardy's hips. Something like terror came into his eyes, and he paled visibly. "You — don't mean —" he began. Then he laughed; but it was a frightened attempt at laughter, still. "They can't take — they wouldn't take Herbie," he said, with a catch in his throat. "I — I couldn't get along without Herbie, here in the store. Oh, no, I really couldn't let Herbie go. Besides," and now Mr. Hardy was beginning to win back his self-possession, "besides, there are millions of young fellows in the country who — aren't needed, you know." Then the butcher added, as a clincher, "Besides, I know Herbie looks well and strong, but maybe you remember we had a hard time to raise him, when he was a baby. He has his off-days, even now."

Miss Perkins glanced grinely at Herbie, the young man who had his "off-days" and therefore would stay at home in Tredick. A few days before, being told that about the healthy young animal before her, she would have rallied Hardy unmercifully, with all the venom of her well-known repartee. Now, she merely shrugged her shoulders, made a brief comment on the weather, and walked out.

Everywhere she went it was the same, or practically the same. That the bond issue was not going to be

very heavily subscribed in Tredick was a certainty. But, more important, it was obvious that Tredick, though it declared itself heart and soul with the United States, had not the slightest idea that the war was going to change its own accustomed ways. In fact, some reassuring soul — possibly Prof. George Watling Wenham — had already circulated the story that long before the draft ever got around Tredick the government would have a million more men than it knew what to do with.

But there was still another thing lacking; the greatest thing of all; and with her discovery of the want of it, Prudence Perkins felt more utterly miserable than she had ever felt in her whole life. It was the lack of a spirit of service, of self-sacrifice — and of vision.

The old woman (she did not seem to be an old woman, as she trod so firmly and vigorously along the road — but she called herself old) stood for a long time in front of the hallway that led upstairs to her office in the Block. She looked at the cleanly washed, tastefully dressed windows of the Fifth Avenue Store — her own and Greenberg's — and she marked the number of persons who were coming into their store. It was a success — there was no doubt of it! But she was not elated. She looked diagonally across the Main street at the shabby, old-fashioned store which now belonged to Deacon Bradshaw. The old sign, "Williams' Dry-Goods Store" still hung over the door. She couldn't help a little feeling of satisfaction and triumph as she looked at first her store and then the other. But that feeling was short-lived. She turned wearily and went upstairs.

Once in her office, Miss Perkins lifted the telephone receiver. She got Sam Greenberg on the other end, and asked him to come upstairs at once. Prudence

was not known to be identified with the Fifth Avenue Store, and only once had she set foot inside, since the opening.

A few minutes later the door opened and Sam stepped in. His face was radiant with pleasure. "Say, Miss Perkins," he said, "everything is going great! We've had more trade than all the rest of the town put together. Of course, I know we're new, and that helps, but they'll never get by our windows. Have you seen the left-hand window? I want to get a classy model — I can pick up a second-hand wax —"

Miss Perkins smiled, absently, and pointed to a chair. "I'm so glad to hear it, Sam," she said, not knowing well what it was she had heard. "I've got something important to tell you, Sam."

"Can I smoke?" asked Sam. "I've got nerves, with all this business, and when I get nervous I want a cigarette."

"Smoke all you want to," was the reply, "but listen carefully. I'm going to leave town, Sam."

"Is that so, Miss Perkins! When'll you be back? Because I want to —"

Again that same mysterious smile, something new and strange for her, a smile that had sweetness and purpose and faith and idealism in it, came on her thin lips. "I don't know when I shall be back," she answered. "It may be I'll never come back. I don't know. Certainly I hope to."

Sam Greenberg jumped up, thunderstruck. "But, great Scott!" he cried, "we've just — well, I know, Miss Perkins, that this little partnership is a small thing to you, with all your other affairs — but we're just starting, and your judgment —"

"I think your judgment is fine, Sam," was the calm response. "And I think better of you than I did before, too. You've justified my belief, Sam. You've

got uncommon sense — sense enough to take advice and act on it —”

“I don’t use so much slang, do I?” interrupted Sam, proudly. “Oh, I’ve managed to ‘can’ most of it, Miss Perkins.”

She laughed. “Good for you! — Now, listen — we’ve both got other business. Before I leave here, I shall adjust everything. Richard Rockhold, my lawyer, you know, will attend to everything, Sam. You’ll deal with him, and you’ll find him just as fine an old man as he looks — a little slow and drawling and fussy, but honest as the day is long. I’ve made arrangements to tide the Fifth Avenue Store over any little difficulty; get better acquainted with Stenner, Sam! He’s sound and helpful, and he knows everything he needs to know about my affairs. And don’t be too harsh in dealing with Deacon Bradshaw. He’ll be as mean as he can toward you — just be as decent as you can toward him. This store of ours has nearly taken the life out of him. — And that’s all of business.”

Miss Perkins tilted back in her swivel-chair and looked curiously at her companion for a moment. Then she said, “What do you think of the war, Sam? Honest, now. Just what you think.”

“Well, I s’pose it had to be,” was the reply. “I ain’t strong on war, Miss Perkins. But I’m an American, and what’s good enough for the country I guess’ll have to be good enough for me.”

“How old are you, Sam?”

“I’ll be twenty-nine my next birthday.”

The woman nodded slowly. Then she said, “Sam, I want to leave this idea with you, and this is all. You’ve seen a good deal of our folks here in Tredick — you’ll see a lot more of them. I think they’re as good folks, Sam, as the sun ever shone on. I mean, way down deep. But they — I don’t know just what has

happened to them. It may be they've been too prosperous; it may be their minds have grown faster than their souls. If I were religious, Sam, I'd say they had forgotten their Lord. But I'm not very religious — not in that way. If I were a doctor, I might say they eat too hearty. I don't know what it is. But Tredick folks are going to meet the greatest crisis of all their lives, Sam; and my prayer is that they'll meet it, when they realize it, like true men and women. Something they need — some sorrow, some awful grief, some shock — something, to wake them out of their narrow lives. I know, Sam; I've been one of them; I am yet — but now I see more clearly. There is a time coming that will put us all to the test, Sam. And when that time comes I hope you — you, Sam Greenberg, proprietor of the Fifth Avenue Store in Tredick, — I hope you'll quietly think it over — and act as wisely and as finely as you know how. I like to think that you'll forget even our store, Sam, when the time comes. Do you see what I mean?"

Only very vaguely did Sam Greenberg see what Prudence was driving at — then. But he told her that he did, very soberly and with honest apprehension in his face.

She held out her hand to him, saw him go, locked her desk, and went home.

As she entered the kitchen of the Gilstar house — coming in by the side entrance — Prudence heard a merry babble of voices in the sitting-room. She recognized all the voices — Tom Gilstar, Dorothy Gilstar, Antonia, Alice Bradshaw — and once in a while the subdued, mellow voice of Mrs. Gilstar. As she did not want to disturb them, or to join them, at the moment, Miss Perkins sat down in a rocking chair by the window, and looked dreamily out at the syringa bush that patted softly against it.

"To be of service — that's it!" she murmured.
"To do what we can — that's it!"

There was a knock on the door. Prudence jumped up and opened it. As she did so, she started back with a little cry, and put a hand to her breast, which fluttered.

A young fellow in khaki stood before her.

He was a splendid specimen of manhood, this young soldier, spick and span in his woolen khaki uniform, with carefully-wound puttees, and a stern-looking visored regulation cap on his head. He had clear blue eyes; on the sides of his head, his hair was closely clipped; and his face was bronze in color with the outdoor zest breathing from it. And when he spoke, he showed two rows of white teeth, set in powerful, but symmetrical and even attractive jaws. He touched his cap.

"Are you Mrs. Gilstar?" he asked. "My name is Gillis. I'm a recruiting sergeant. They've closed the hotel dining-room, and they said I could possibly get my meals up here." He spoke with the formality of one who has learned his speech from manuscript. But, seeing the peculiar look on Prudence Perkins' face, he mistook it for a rebuff, and colored boyishly. With perfect respectfulness, and only a little patient chagrin of a man who has met many such rebuffs, he said, "It may be, ma'am, that you wouldn't care to have a soldier —"

"Care to have a soldier!" cried Prudence. "You just better believe we care to have a soldier!" She looked at him again. "The reason I — acted so," she explained, "was — I thought for a minute it was — some one who used to be at this house. I'm not Mrs. Gilstar — but I'll promise you she'll feed you, and feed you well. Come right in!"

Miss Perkins threw open the sitting-room door.

"Phœbe," she said, "here's a young man who wants to take his meals here." And with a queer pride and satisfaction which she could not have explained then, the woman, with unmistakable maternal glow in her eyes, presented Sergeant Gillis to the company.

Tom Gilstar dragged his bulk out of a chair and greeted the soldier with shy warmth. As they shook hands, the sergeant professionally appraised the figure of the big fellow before him, and gave him a man-size grip of the hand.

The three young women, not knowing whether to rise or remain seated; feeling that there might be some special formality when a uniform was present, but having no idea what it was, were joyously flustered almost to the giggling point. They wanted to giggle and buzz and flee the room; without knowing why they felt so. The reason was, that it had been drilled into their young heads, at the impressionable age, that soldiers were nice but naughty, and that young women should cultivate a benevolent contempt for men in uniform, if for no other reason than that uniforms were so naturally attractive to the feminine eye.

Sergeant Gillis himself was plainly awkward and embarrassed in the presence of the young women. He had removed his cap, and was fiddling with it nervously. Prudence broke the silence, saying:

"The young man — I didn't quite catch your — oh, yes! Gillis! — Sergeant Gillis is here on recruiting business, Phœbe. Butterfield has given him a room at the hotel, but the dining room is closed, and he was recommended to you." At the same time she flashed a signal of approval at her sister, which was understood. Mrs. Gilstar put forth her hand and welcomed the young fellow to the house.

"You'll be here to supper?" she asked.

Gillis nodded, thanked her, and made a hasty exit, saying that he would be back by six o'clock.

"Isn't he a fine looking fellow?" exclaimed Prudence, after the sergeant was gone. The girls made no reply, but did some whispering. But Tom said, generously, "Well, that's just what he is, aunt!" His aunt looked at him a long time, after that, but she did not say anything.

After supper, Miss Perkins went to her room. She was there a long time, and when she came down stairs, she had two suit-cases with her. She called her sister out into the hall, threw her arms around her neck, and kissed her tenderly.

"I'm going away for a while, Phœbe," she said. "You'll hear from me. You see now, Phœbe, that we are really at war. This young fellow who came this afternoon — he has brought war to us. It has begun. I'm not going to say good-by to Tom and Dorothy — I just can't. Kiss them both for me."

"But, Prudence!" exclaimed the shocked Mrs. Gilstar. "I don't understand —"

"No, dear," was the reply, as Prudence patted her sister on the shoulder. "And I can't explain. I'm leaving on the sleeper, at twelve. I've got a lot of work to do at the office. I'll write you, Phœbe, and explain everything later."

That night there was a light burning in Miss Perkins' office, till nearly midnight. Then it went out; and a tall, angular, determined woman, unafraid of the night or anything else, made her way to the station alone. At the station she met Tom Gilstar. She had forgotten that he would be there. But, just as the train was coming in, she put an arm under his arm, and said tenderly:

"Good-by, Tom. If anything should happen before

I get back; I mean any great event; I mean, if — if they say they need you — in our army, I hope you'll remember that your father was a soldier, Tom, and a brave, good man. Something tells me, Tom, that you won't flinch when the time comes."

And so Prudence Perkins went away from Tredick.

IX

THE recruiting flag of the United States Army hung from a second-story window of the Commercial Hotel; a sandwich-board rested on the sidewalk in front of the hotel, inviting young men to enlist for the service of their country; and, by turns, Sergeant Gillis and his partner, a rangy Middle-western soldier named Kilpatrick, stood at their post beside the sandwich-board, on the watch for youthful patriots.

It goes without saying that the army never picks its worst-looking men for recruiting duty. The very sight of Gillis and his fellow officer — their backs like ramrods, their tan shoes polished neatly, uniforms fitting like gloves, sent a tingle of admiration and envy into every Tredick heart, though the greater number of Tredick hearts refused pointblank to admit it. There was scarcely a moment of the day when some straggling Tredick males were not staring, from a safe distance, at the recruiters. But enlistment — that was another thing! Tredick had prepared for Universal Peace, not for enlistment.

There were schoolboys who yearned to join the army, and to be like the splendid Sergeant Gillis. But the idea was promptly squelched when they reported their ambitions at home. "Huh!" sneered father, "I guess you wouldn't be in the army more than a week before you'd give your right hand to be home again. Why, you don't know what the army is! Those fellows down at the Commercial Hotel may be nice enough, in their way, but the most of 'em — well, ask anybody who knows!"

There being nobody who knew (a fact which father was sure of), the ardent youths concluded that Tre-dick, after all, was safer than membership in an army of toughs, thieves and cutthroats.

If this argument did not avail, the prudent friends of would-be enlisters wagged their heads knowingly and said, "Why, you poor ninny, you'll never get across the ocean. Do you know what it means to drown! Do you! Think of it! Torpedoed out in the middle of the ocean,—ugh!" Or, sometimes it was, "Read the papers, boy, read the papers! Why, they die like sheep over there. What do they care for *your* life? Sometimes they kill their own men with cannon by mistake!"

There were a number of men who would enlist, but they couldn't be spared from their work. There were a number who would enlist—later. A very considerable number spoke seriously on the subject with the recruiting officers, went home to think it over. They thought it over, and thereafter walked on the other side of the street when they passed the Commercial Hotel.

Suppressing his weariness, Sergeant Gillis stood by his sandwich-board hour after hour, looking searchingly and appraisingly at the males who passed. He had had orders not to be too ardent in his solicitation; so when he saw a young fellow who looked fit, he merely smiled at him, tried to engage him in conversation, and put the proposition up to him with soldierly bluntness and honesty.

"Now, look here," he would say, "we need you, feller! The government is going to get you if it wants you, you know that. Why not be a regular feller, and enlist, and pick your own branch of the service? Come on, let's talk it over."

But the net result, after three days, was that one

raw youth walked into Tredick from a farm eight miles away, offered himself for enlistment, was sent down to the main office in Springhaven — and rejected on physical grounds.

At noon, on the fourth day, the two recruiting officers were completely disgusted. They were talking Tredick over in no gentle terms. "There's nothing doing here in this burg, Kil," said Gillis. "This bunch is going to wait for the draft — you can see that. They don't know there's a war. I wrote to the boss last night that it looks rotten. I don't know why they sent us up here, anyway."

"Well, I'll be glad enough to quit, you bet," was the reply. "A lot of the people here give you a fishy eye as if you was going to pick their pockets, or something. I guess these guys used to walk more on this side of the street, till we came. Notice how the girls cling to the other sidewalk, and never give a fellow even a decent smile. They've been told that we're a lousy bunch, Gillis — that's what! The only time I've felt like a man was last night up at that Gilstar place, where you eat. That did seem a little like home. Tell the boss to put us somewhere we can pick some live ones."

Gillis went to dinner at Gilstars' that noon, very much depressed. There was a great rivalry among the recruiting officers as to which station could make the best returns; and besides that, the soldier was one of those chaps who, without possessing any great mental qualities, had a saving grace of sincerity and purpose. After dinner he was sitting in a rocking-chair, gloomily, until Mrs. Gilstar said, in her quiet way:

"Are you — getting many enlistments here, Mr. Gillis?"

He looked up at her and grinned. "If the country depended on what we can get out of Tredick, Mrs.

Gilstar, the Germans would be playing marbles in the Capitol at Washington, in a few weeks!"

The old woman said nothing more for a while. She was looking straight ahead, but she was not seeing anything in that room. A queerly happy-sorrowful smile hovered on her lips, and a little film came over her eyes. She looked up at the crayon enlargement of the late Mr. Gilstar, over the mantel. Finally she said:

"I had — I have another boy — somewhere, Mr. Gillis. I guess you — haven't heard him mentioned. He was in the army, too."

Gillis was interested at once. "Is that so?" he answered. "In the regular army, Mrs. Gilstar?"

"Yes, he was in the Philippines — the last we knew. I thought — perhaps you might have been in the Philippines, too. I don't suppose you would have known him, though — the army is so large."

"Why, I have served in the Philippines," said Gillis. Suddenly his eye lighted up with a beam of struggling recollection. "That name — Gilstar — you know, Mrs. Gilstar, it's kind of odd name — I've been wondering where I've heard it. Gilstar! Gilstar! I'm sure I didn't know your son — but there's something about that name sticks in my crop. Gilstar. Did he ever write from Mindanao, from a little godforsaken place called El Buey?"

"Mindanao — yes — yes!" breathed Mrs. Gilstar. "That was the last place he was in, I'm sure. You — you must have known him, Mr. Gillis!"

Gillis ran his hands through his hair, trying to recall. He shook his head. Then, after a pause, he asked, quickly, "He wasn't a medium-sized fellow, with black hair and very dark eye-brows, and a squarish jaw like mine, and a kind of a devilish — you know — smile on his face — good natured, full of fun like? As if he was always up to some deviltry, I mean?"

"That's my boy — that's Sherry!" cried Mrs. Gilstar, reaching out a hand toward Gillis, and looking into his eyes as though she expected to see the reflection of her missing son there.

Then the sergeant whacked his open hand on the arm of the chair. "I've got him now!" he exclaimed. "I know where I saw him! No, I didn't know him personally, Mrs. Gilstar, but I saw him once when we were in camp in El Buey. I've got him now! He came over with another fellow, just after he'd been mentioned in orders for saving the life of a pal of his — I remember the fellow's name, because it was the same name as my best pal — it was Murray. Yes, Murray was with him — a red-headed fellow, I think he was — tall and thin, just like my bunkie. I don't just remember what the game was — it was when the Moros got the idea in their heads they could lick us, one time — but I remember this chap Gilstar was mentioned in orders. Well, well! was that your son, Mrs. Gilstar? I'm sorry I wasn't acquainted with him. Did you say he was still in the Philippines?"

Instantly, from the trembling lip before him, the young fellow saw that he had made a bad break. He tried to mitigate it by saying, hastily, "What I mean is —" Then he stopped, confused.

But Mrs. Gilstar did not break down, as he feared. Instead, a little look of hopefulness shone in her eyes, as she replied, softly, "We — don't know, Mr. Gillis. Sherry hasn't written, for a long time. Oh, I'm sure he's all right. I'm certain he'll come back — maybe any day."

"Of course he will!" responded the sergeant, with a comically vociferous effort to cheer the woman. "Sure he will. Wherever he is, Mrs. Gilstar, when he hears of this shindig over in France, he'll beat it for a recruiting office. Oh, sure! You can't keep

the boys away when there's a hurry-call goes out for them. I tell you, we like to run across one of the —"

But Mrs. Gilstar wasn't following this spirited discourse now. She rose, and stood for a few moments beneath the picture of the boy in blue uniform. "This was Sherry's father, Mr. Gillis," she murmured, with glowing eyes. "He was just like Sherry, at his age. He was only fifteen when he went to the Civil War."

Sergeant Gillis was on his feet. He saluted the crayon portrait with grave sincerity.

"I think war is a dreadful thing," added the little woman. "I don't understand all about this one, Mr. Gillis, but I know that our country has called for sacrifices, and we must make them, even if it breaks our hearts. I'm sorry — I don't say anything about it — the people here are nice people, Mr. Gillis — but they aren't doing as they did in the Civil War. I was only a child then — my husband and I didn't meet till long after the war — but I heard about it all."

Sergeant Gillis stood, watching the woman intently. Something about her words gave him courage to ask a question that had evidently been in his mind. He blurted out, "Mrs. Gilstar, I haven't said anything — it didn't seem quite right, somehow, to take advantage of being right here under your roof — so I hadn't said anything to your son Tom — about enlisting. I wonder — I don't know just how to say it — would you have any objection — if I should speak to him — somehow he's such a great big fine fellow that if Treddick people saw him — you know. If you don't want me to ask him, I won't, I promise you that. I realize that you've had one son in the army. There are plenty of people who haven't had even one."

The tired, wistful eyes closed for a moment. She was leaning against the wall. Then she put her hands over her eyes and trembled violently. But she replied,

with a courage that sent the blood hurrying through the veins of the soldier, as he watched her, sorry that he had brought up the subject, "I — I have no objection — no. It must be. That is what Prudence meant. I —"

"Why, mother!" cried the frightened voice of Tom Gilstar. "What's the matter?" The big fellow had entered, and stood looking first at his mother and then at Gillis. For, as he had come in, he heard the woman sob convulsively.

"I think perhaps I'd better speak of the matter later," suggested the sergeant, to Mrs. Gilstar. And to Tom he said, "I'm sorry I brought up a subject that upset your mother." And the good fellow started to leave.

"No; you needn't go!" came the response from Mrs. Gilstar. "It — it may as well be now as any time!" She turned to her big son and looked him in the eyes. Then she stepped over to him and drew her arm under his, and put her tear-stained face against his shoulder. "Tom," she said, "we were speaking about you. I — I have told the sergeant that — he has my permission —" She could not get any farther at the moment. She gestured at Gillis, indicating that he could go on.

Sergeant Gillis looked as though he would far rather quit the scene, even at the expense of losing a recruit. But he had to see it through now. So he said, "To tell the truth, Tom, I was asking your mother about your enlisting. I thought somehow it wouldn't be fair to speak to you first, me being a kind of guest here. *Tom, I'd like to put you in khaki.* I'll ask you straight out like one regular feller to another, will you join us?"

The first expression on Tom Gilstar's face was simply that of amazement. It was as though he had

not once considered himself a possible candidate for the army. He looked at his mother inquiringly. She was looking steadfastly away from her son. Then a deep red flush came in the big fellow's cheeks. "I don't see how I can," he said, in a low voice. "You know I'm the constable here."

"Why, great Scott, if that's the only thing," answered Gillis quickly, used as he was to rebut objections. "I'll guarantee —"

"No, it isn't the only thing," added Tom. "You see, Mr. Gillis, I — we have a brother. But we haven't heard from him for a long time. So I couldn't leave my mother alone —"

"Perhaps it's better to be alone, Tom, than to feel that I've prevented you from serving your country," said a repressed voice.

Tom stared at his mother. He could hardly believe what he heard. He had felt all along that in such a case as this, he would have the satisfaction of making a sacrifice for his mother. Now his mother wanted to make the sacrifice herself! It was something he had never dreamed of. It cut the ground from under his feet. He saw his mother's face slowly turning toward him. He felt Sergeant Gillis regarding him keenly. The perspiration started out on his forehead. He hadn't dreamed of going to war. The times he had thought of it, he had assured himself that a constable would naturally be exempt from the draft. Deacon Bradshaw had said as much. All the horrible pictures that had gone through his mind, in thinking of the war reeled before him now. He saw himself with a rifle in his hands — a rifle — to kill a man — he, who had never killed anything — to kill a man! The goose-flesh came out on him. He lifted his eyes and turned anxiously toward his mother. She was gone! Then he had a delayed sensation that she had patted him

gently on the sleeve. And he heard her going upstairs. He was alone with Gillis!

"I — couldn't kill anybody — I simply couldn't!" gasped Tom. "I told them that when I got this constable job."

Sergeant Gillis was looking at him with a reassuring and understanding smile. "Sure!" he said, "I know how you feel, Tom. It ain't a pleasant sensation. Say, Tom, I remember sticking a nigger with my bayonet — he was coming for me crazy with a *kris* — I saw his eyes — they seemed to be as red as live coals — and I gave it to him, through the stomach. Gee, kid, I almost gave up my breakfast — I felt as if I had the iron in my own stomach. I couldn't get over it that day. We got the recall, and I could hardly hoof in. I couldn't see anything but that jab. I thought I was going nutty. Then, Tom, it came over me — the old Stars and Stripes were coming down at sunset — I saw the old flag. I says to myself, 'Gillis, there's something bigger than your own feelings — and that's the country you're working for. Maybe the folks at Washington are off their nuts — if they are, this blood is on them. You didn't come here to decide whether their nuts were loose or not. You got sent here to do what you was told. The chances are those guys know more than you do about it.' And I felt better. It ain't no use telling me that war is a nasty job, Tom. I know it is. But as long as there is any country that wants to take a fall out of another country, there's war — and it's a darn sight nastier job to lie down like a dog and whine. We didn't start this war, Tom — but by God, it's up to us to finish it! Then, if the guys that run the countries want to abolish war, why take it from me, bo, I'll be tickled to death.— What do you say, Tom?"

"I wouldn't be any good. I haven't got the nerve.

You don't want men like me — you want regular fighting kind of fellows — like my brother Sheridan," said Tom, shaking his head.

But Gillis only smiled more broadly. He seemed to understand perfectly. "I get you!" he cried, joyously, as though it were a new and wonderful bit of humor. "I've seen a lot of them just like you, Tom. They think they lack nerve. Why, I've seen a rookie crying himself to sleep, and nursing the idea that he was a damn coward. But he wasn't, Tom. He just hadn't got started, that's all. Somebody at home had always patted his head and rocked him to sleep — but they hadn't made a coward of him. I'll tell you a lot about that.— What do you say, Tom? God, boy, I want to see a uniform on you! You'll look like a whole regiment. They'll have to make a special bunk in the transport to get you across."

The half of it, Tom Gilstar no longer heard. He stood limply, unable to argue, unable to run, to dodge. The war had come and plucked him by the sleeve. His mother was willing! That fact alone had overthrown his balance. Did she really want him to go? It was unthinkable — but something told him it might be so. He blurted out, slowly, "I — can't think straight, Mr. Gillis. Will you let me tell you to-morrow?"

In recruiting, delays are dangerous. But this was a special case. Sergeant Gillis stuck out his right hand. "Put it there, Tom, old boy," he said. "Sure — we'll fix it up to-morrow.— So long." And Tom was left alone.

The big fellow sat down and covered his face with his hands. It all seemed like a nightmare. When he had waked up that morning, there was no such world around him as existed now. He was on the edge of a precipice. The thing was all done, with one more word. He wanted to cling to something — to some-

body. He wanted to hear somebody advise him not to do this thing. He couldn't see his mother. The sudden sound of her feet on the stairs sent him toward the door — and he was walking rapidly down the street a few moments afterward.

Tom Gilstar had seen little of Antonia Pillicy since that day Deacon Bradshaw had made him constable. In those intervening days he felt that he loved her and needed her more than ever. She had seemed to avoid him; and yet, whenever they met, always she had a gracious smile and a friendly word. There came now into Tom's mind an idea that was essentially boyish and innocent, just as might be expected in a mind that had remained, despite his growth in intelligence, boyish and naïve. The young fellow was far too innocent and generous and clear to be calculating — but somehow there ran through his mind now a definite suggestion — and it was this; suppose he should go to Antonia and tell her that he was thinking of enlisting? He had heard somewhere, sometime, that if women saw a man in trouble, their attitude would change. If they really cared for a man at all, the idea that the man might be whisked off to war should certainly bring all that affection to the surface. With these simple thoughts in his mind, the big fellow went to the Pillicy house.

'Tony herself answered the bell. Always that same sweet smile in her face — and she put out a hand that was very soft and warm. "Come right in, Tom," she said. "I'm alone, but mother'll be home very soon." She looked very charming in a plain navy-blue dress with a starched white collar.

"Yes, I'll come in a few minutes," said Tom awkwardly. "I wanted to see you about something important, 'Tony." She flashed a look at him as though she were sure she knew what the important matter was;

and the color came into her cheeks quickly. But he quite took her breath away when he explained:

"I'm thinking of enlisting in the army, 'Tony.'" He had figured that this would be the most effective way of putting it.

It was. It brought the girl to her feet, and she stared at him in amazement.

"Tom!" she cried. "You don't mean it! Not *really!*"

He nodded soberly. And he was astonished to find how much satisfaction there was in stating the dramatic thing. "Oh, I haven't actually enlisted yet," he went on, stressing heavily on that narrow chasm which yet separated him from such a step, "but I've been talking with Sergeant Gillis about it. He wants me to. I thought I'd get some advice before I really did it. But I think — my mother is willing."

Understand, Tom Gilstar up to this moment had felt nothing more than the possible danger of going into the army. So he was unprepared for what followed.

The girl looked at him for a moment; her lips parted; and her eyes became animated with an excitement and emotion which Tom had never seen in them before. She put a hand upon his sleeve and came close to him.

"Tom!" she murmured, "I can hardly believe it! You — are — going to fight in France! To think, Tom — that it should be *you* — I mean — most people will be surprised — but I'm not surprised, Tom — I knew you had it in you, when the time came! It's splendid! Oh, Tom, I take back anything I said to you — please don't remember any of it — I don't feel that way any more now — I'll never forget you a single moment while you're away — that is, if you still feel the same way about me, Tom —"

The big fellow took her hands, not well knowing

what he was doing, and gazed into her eyes, dumb.

"Oh, it isn't that I want you to go away, Tom. No; we've just found each other, and it will hurt me, terribly. I guess that it's — that I want you to want to go — yes, yes, that's it!"

She was in his arms now, clinging to him, letting all her weakness and strength merge in his, and her face was raised to him, and she was half laughing, half-crying.

Many a man has sealed his doom with a kiss; many a man has saved his soul by touching a woman's lips. So did Tom Gilstar then, either one or the other; his heart beating, thumping, in his breast, he gave himself up to the moment, and kissed the red lips that offered with happy abandon toward his. He had not come to Antonia Pillicy to be enlisted in the service of his country; he had come for sympathy, for safety, for God-knows-what thing — and the girl had taken it for granted that his mind was made and his loyalty placed. There was no retreat. He summoned all his strength and said, quietly, "I'll do my best, 'Tony; I can't do any more."

"I'll be so miserable, Tom, and so happy," she breathed into his ear.

Slowly, thoughtfully, Tom went on to Deacon Bradshaw's. The deacon had just come from his new store; he was peevish, upset and indignant at the way customers were going into the Fifth Avenue Store. He was busy hating Sam Greenberg at the moment; so busy that he merely glanced at Tom Gilstar and growled, "Well, well, Tom; I'm busy."

"I just came to tell you that I'm going to enlist in the army, deacon," said Tom, with a faint satisfaction at the jar the news would carry with it.

"What!" yelled the deacon. "You're — a fool, Tom!"

No reply to that. The charge found almost an approving echo in Tom's own mind. "You'll get shot for your pains!" added the deacon. "You'll do no such thing, Tom! Besides," he went on, "you're our constable. They can't take a town's constable. There's nobody else for the job. Have they been threatening you into it? You leave it to me, Tom — I'll see that you stay at home where you belong."

"No, sir," was the reply, "it's my own free decision. I'm going to enlist to-day. I'm on my way down there now. I'll ask them if I can have two weeks before I go away, to give you time to get another constable, if you want me to." With that Tom started out.

"Here! Come here, you!" cried the deacon; but the only answer was the closing of the door.

Sergeant Gillis was just taking in the sandwich board when Tom Gilstar came up behind him, plucked him by the arm, and said breathlessly, "I've made up my mind, Sergeant Gillis! I'll enlist."

"At-a-boy!" cried Gillis. "Good for you, Tom. I knew you'd be all to the good when the time came. Come on upstairs." They went up quickly to the room in the hotel. "Here's a regular man!" was the sergeant's greeting to Kilpatrick. "If this doesn't start the ball rolling, they're a bunch of dead ones! Sit down, Tom. Now there's no use of bothering with a preliminary examination here. I'm going down to the office at Springhaven to-morrow, and I'll take you along with me."

"There was just one thing I wanted to ask," said Tom. "I told Deacon Bradshaw that I'd try to stay here as constable for a couple of weeks after I enlisted. Do you suppose they'd let me?"

"All the breaks go in favor of the man who walks up and enlists," quoth Gillis, sententiously. "I haven't

a doubt but you can arrange it. They don't want to make it hard for anybody."

Then, it seemed no more than a few minutes afterward, so fast the time went, that Tom Gilstar was standing in a bare, bleak room in Springhaven, nervously facing several army officers who looked at him without particular interest, but in a certainly friendly way. He gave his name, place of birth, age, next of kin and occupation with utmost gravity. There was a little thin-haired man, with glasses, at the desk — they referred to him as "Wittmeyer," and he looked as German as Hindenburg — though he told Tom afterward that he had been in the cavalry of the United States army for thirty years.

They pulled out a standard, bearing cryptic letters upon it; fronted Tom Gilstar toward it, at a distance of fifteen feet or so, and blindfolded one of his eyes. "Read that top line!"

"E J U N K 5 X L," read Tom.

"Read the next line!"

He did.

The other eye is covered.

"Read the top line!"

"E J U N K 5 X L."

"Both normal!"

One of Tom's ears is covered tightly. Somebody whispers, sepulchrally, "Chicago."

"Chicago," repeated Tom, in a thick quaver.

"St. Louis."

"St. Louis."

The other ear is covered.

Tom Gilstar's hearing proves to be excellent.

"Take off your clothes!"

Never before since a boy, had he taken off his clothes in the presence of other males. He turned red,

there was a dry cough in his throat which he could not cough. He looked swiftly around at the men in the room. They were paying no more attention to him than as if he had been a yesterday's newspaper. He went to a settee at the side and began to strip, slowly.

It was all effected with business-like speed and sang-froid. Once his clothes were off, Tom felt better. After all, it was taking off his clothes that worried him. He felt the cold fingers that carried a tape measure spidering along his flesh. He heard numbers being called, and words of which he knew the meaning, but failed to catch the application.

"Hop across to the other side on your right foot. On the ball of your foot!" The big, fine figure went flying across the room and stopped at the other end, still on that one foot.

"Good! Now back on the other foot!"

It was well done. "Fine!" said the officer. "I'm always afraid of flat feet in you big fellows. You ought to have seen the way we've been turning 'em down for broken arches. You're lucky."

"Lucky!" Tom didn't feel so sure of it. He wondered, in a flash, how those fellows who were so unlucky as to be turned down on account of broken arches, felt about it.

Then came the searching medical examination — lungs, heart. Questions which sent the color into Tom's cheeks, and which he thanked the Lord he could answer in the negative. It was done! The commanding officer listened patiently to Tom's explanation of how badly he would be needed in Tredick for a couple weeks after he was enlisted.

"Oh, that'll be all right. We want to get the uniform on you, Gilstar, and straighten your back a little — you don't know how much you stoop over, my lad

— Great Scott, a fellow like you ought not to have shoulders like those — here — that's more like it! — see! — chin in — that's right — your chest would all run down to your abdomen in a few more years. Wait till we put the khaki on you — you'll grow into it naturally."

"Grow into it naturally." Tom Gilstar had no idea what that might mean.

"How about a uniform for this young man?"

"Oh, that's easy. It's the medium sizes we're hard up for. We've got outsizes to burn, captain."

Somebody came up and grasped Tom Gilstar by the hand. It was a little, hooknosed, pale fellow he had never seen before. "I'm enlisting too," explained the stranger. "You passed?"

Tom nodded.

A gleam of joy was in the pale fellow's face. He walked aside with Tom and spurted out his triumph, as though he could contain it no longer. "Sh! I fooled 'em," said the youth. "I was turned down for life insurance, but I got by this examiner — and I'm in! Once I'm in, they can't kick me out, can they?" he added anxiously.

Tom gazed at the stranger with wide open mouth. There were actually fellows who wanted to go to war, then? Who felt badly if they weren't allowed to? He hadn't dreamed of it — and yet — Sherry had gone of his own accord.

Thus went Tom Gilstar to the war — or, at least, thus he entered the active service of his country.

It was a wonder in Tredick. It was slightly shaded, as a monstrosity, however, by the news that got abroad, that Miss Prudence Perkins had disappeared from town, telling nobody except her business advisers,

where she was going. The two wonders, coming together, shook Tredick from end to end. What would happen next?

Tredick was not superstitious — not really — not slavishly. And yet, Tredick, for years, had been in the habit of predicting that great events happen in cycles of three. Let lightning strike a place twice — Tredick would say, “It will strike once more — those things go in threes.” If a man had two great misfortunes, Tredick would cluck meditatively and say, “Poor fellow, he’ll have another — those things always go in threes.”

Tredick now held its breath. These things always go in threes. Tom Gilstar, the man who had admitted, tacitly, that he was a coward, had enlisted in the army. Miss Perkins, the richest woman in the county, had mysteriously gone away. There must be three things. What next?

X

NOT one person in Tredick doubted for a moment that Tom Gilstar had enlisted in the army as the result of an uncontrollable burst of patriotism. Only Tom Gilstar himself knew that he had, in a tragic-comic way, jockeyed himself into it, by trying to avoid it. So the first net result was that, within twenty-four hours after it was announced that Tom would go to war, four other young men walked into the recruiting office and signed up with Uncle Sam. For it is not much otherwise with enlistment than with ringing the canes at the county fair; let one bold adventurer start the game and others are sure to follow.

Tredick was intensely aroused; Tredick was incredulous as yet; Tredick scarcely believed its own eyes when, five days afterward, Tom Gilstar came back to Tredick to put in another ten days as constable before he went into camp. He had gone away a big, good-looking fellow in a blue suit of clothes, a brown felt hat, and a starched collar. He came back a bigger, better looking fellow in khaki — not as yet soldierly in manner; no — but a Tom Gilstar who, when he walked down the main street, was no longer glanced at with a tolerant smile, as though everybody knew his failing, as though it was too commonly known that he was a bit of a coward, to make it worth the comment.

Mrs. Gilstar sobbed luxuriously when she saw her big son in khaki; she cried delightedly every time he left the house or entered it, almost every time she looked at him. It harrowed Tom's nerves frightfully; but he said nothing. He tried to suppress that inevi-

table shudder when the proud little woman held him out at arm's length and looked him up and down and said, devoutly, "Oh, Tom, if your father could only see you! How happy he would be! And perhaps he does see you."

It was pleasanter to be with Antonia; Tom made the most of that. In the girl's eyes sparkled all that forgivable little vanity of a young woman who has a sweetheart at whom all the rest of the world is looking — jealously, preferred, of course. Those delicious moments — a new and wonderful world to the big fellow — when 'Tony's eyes opened wide and revealed to him all her fragrant soul, almost made him forget his fears. But they came back again after he left her. Perhaps they came back with redoubled force just because he had neglected them — and he was ill at ease, reticent and leaden at heart.

There were yet three more days before Tom was to leave Tredick. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and Henry Hobgood was celebrating his usual daily grouch to the people who appeared at the postoffice window for the just-sorted mail. The little white-whiskered hornet glared through the window, as if daring anybody and everybody to step up and be stung.

"Parcel post, is it?" he snapped. "Oh, yes, we've got parcel post. We've got oceans of it. We can't move in here without tripping over parcel post. I s'pose yours is a lawn-mower or a washing-machine?"

"No, thir," answered a little miss outside, "'ith a thetting of duck-eggth Aunt Mary thed the'd thend mamma."

"Aha!" clucked Henry, with uncanny glee. "A setting of duck-eggs, is it! Here it is!" He plunked down a frayed and evil-looking wreck on the counter, lifted the grating and shoved it out. There was a

coloring of coagulated yellow matter oozing from the package. "You tell your ma that the guv'ment has sot on her duck eggs and hatched out an egg-nog," he exulted. "I'd think folks would have more sense than to clutter up the mails with duck-eggs. It serves 'em right!"

To a courteous Pole, a mill worker, who came timidly to add to his postal savings account, the postmaster said, shrilly, clutching at the book and money, "Huh! Sure we do a savings-bank business! We do every kind of a business these days. We'll be taking in washing and ironing next. By jinks, when I was postmaster under Cleveland, there warn't none of this folderol! We was postmasters, then. Now, by jinks, we're running a department store!"

Then there appeared at the window a smooth-shaven face, unknown to Mr. Hobgood. A pair of very placid eyes looked at the postmaster swiftly, and a pleasant, suave voice asked, "Are you the postmaster?"

"Yes, what d'ye want?" was the challenging rejoinder.

A smile uncovered the teeth of the visitor. "I want you," was the reply. "Come out here a minute. I want to speak with you."

The words were uttered with perfect good nature, but in a way which indicated that the stranger was not inclined to stand any fooling, and that he was accustomed to be obeyed. Henry Hobgood eyed him irascibly, and muttered, "All right, I'll be out pretty soon."

"You'll be out sooner than that," was the still smiling response, with the same covert threat about it. "This is on government business." Mr. Hobgood replied by grasping his hat and going out in the front of the office.

For a moment, as they stood face to face, the

stranger rested with his mouth framed for speech — at the same time staring at the fidgety old man. He evidently concluded not to say what he had in mind, and substituted: "Who is your police officer — deputy-sheriff — whatever you have, in this village?"

"Who be you?" asked Henry. He had been sizing up the stranger carefully. Something about his manner betokened an officer of the law; but his clothes were those of a well-dressed traveling salesman; there was something even "sporty" about the man.

For reply, the man took Henry by the arm and led him aside. A moment afterward, Mr. Hobgood's eyes bulged somewhat, and were larger than before. "Oh," he gasped, mollifyingly, "why didn't you tell me? — Why, we've got a constable here. His name is Tom Gilstar. But he won't be constable long — he's enlisted in the army."

"Is that so? Where does he live?"

"He'd probably be up home now. He don't come down town, till he goes on duty, since he joined the army." Mr. Hobgood was titillating up and down in anxiety. "There — there ain't no suspicion that I ain't all right in my work?" he quavered.

"Oh, no; that is, I don't know anything about that. This is something different. Not important — not important — a mere trifle. You just give me the way up to — what's his name — Gil-star? — and I'll call on him later."

But having been directed to the Gilstar home, the stranger lost no time in getting there. Tom himself came to the door.

"You're the man I want to see," said the stranger, with one appreciative look at the big fellow. "You're Tom Gilstar? The constable?"

Tom nodded. "Put on your hat and come out,"

went on the man. And as Tom hesitated in surprise, he added, "Oh, my name is Cracknell. I'm a post-office inspector, Gilstar. Is — *that* — good enough?"

Tom nodded quickly, at sight of the metal credentials. As Cracknell buttoned his coat again, Tom said, "I'll come right along."

"We needn't go any farther," began the inspector, when they were in the front yard. "Here's a seat that will be all right." He pointed to a rustic settee under a big tree. "I just wanted to get out in the open, that's all. Now, listen. The postoffice in Tredick, here, may be entered to-night. Does that interest you?" He smiled as he asked the question, and tapped his tooth-brush-bristles mustache with the ends of his fingers.

Tom Gilstar's eyes replied that it did interest him, and then he stammered, "But — but not — not really, Mr. Cracknell? You don't mean it?"

"I said it *may* be," was the reply. "I don't know. I'm up a tree, Gilstar, I've got a stool working for me with a bunch of yeggs, and I'm not sure whether he's on the level, or giving me the double-cross. See?"

"A stool — with a bunch of yeggs —" repeated Tom. "I — don't know as I quite understand you, Mr. Cracknell. I'm not — up on those things, you might say. You see, nothing ever happens in Tredick."

Quite unconsciously, Tom had fallen into the habit of parroting the deacon's favorite line.

The stranger was very pleasant about it. With a tolerant glance — perhaps a pitying glance, he went on, explaining, "What I mean is, I've planted a crook — working for *me* — understand? — among a bunch of yeggs — you know — who think he's working with *them* — get me? — and he's reported in to me — but

something makes me afraid that he's giving me the — well, you know — really working with the yeggs — damn it, you can get that, Gilstar? ”

“ Yes, I see what you mean,” was the abashed answer. “ Yes, sir.”

“ All right. Now the tip was that this bunch — Louis the Blacksmith is running the party — and he's the best hand with soup — you know what I mean — with nitroglycerine — in the East — the tip was that they were to leave New York last night — four of them, not counting Jakey — he's my stool — and leave the train at Arber's Junction. Then break the Springhaven postoffice, which is first class, back to Arber's in a hired jitney, then across country to a place where they can dig in for the night, then strike the line of the B. C. & L. at Spofford, and back to New York and under cover. Get it? Now that isn't all. I dope it from what Jakey says that two of the bunch will split off in Arber and break either Tredick or Valentine — maybe both if they have luck, meet up with the rest at the hangout, wherever it is, and go back together. That's where you come in. That's why I say, *may*. You grab the idea, don't you? ”

“ Yes, sir, I think I do. But maybe, as you say, that fellow isn't telling you the truth — and maybe they won't really come.” It was evident that Tom's wish was father to this inspiration.

“ Ho, don't you bet anything on that, my boy. They left New York last night all right — my partner, Teague, and myself, came up with them on the train. Teague is down at Arber now.”

“ But if you were on the same train with them, and knew who they were, why didn't you arrest them then? ” asked Tom, in wonder.

For reply he got a really pitying glance this time.

"Because, Gilstar, I'm not pinching anybody to bring up before a Federal judge and say, 'Please Mister Judge, this man has a bad record and I think he's going to hurt somebody if we don't send him away.' You may put that stuff over in your local police court, Gilstar, but Mister Federal Judge would give you the glassy eye and say, 'What has the gentleman done?' You say, 'Nothing.' Then you beat it out of court in a hurry before you get eleven years for wasting his Honor's valuable time, see?"

Tom Gilstar didn't see. But he nodded his head in hopeless abandon, while Cracknell went on, in a mellow-er vein:

"Oh, we've got the chance of our lives, if Jakey hasn't double-crossed us, Gilstar. We'll round up that bunch with the bells on. It'll seem like music to send Louis the Blacksmith up the river again. Louis and I are old friends, I gave him a ride to Joliet when I was first in the business; and I'd have had him in Atlanta now, only for a technicality, for a postoffice job in Ohio two years ago. Harry Allen is another of the sweet crowd. Then there are two recruits Louis has had in training. I don't know as they've even been nugged—Teague didn't recognize 'em either. Oh, it's soft, Gilstar, soft—provided we're there to meet 'em when they come in;—now, listen. This is a fourth class office, like Valentine. They won't waste any time here. I've got it doped that they have to be here, if they come, between eleven and twelve. Now you know how they work, don't you?"

"No," gulped Tom, in a cold sweat. "I—don't think so."

"Well, in a country office job," went on the inspector, "they don't weigh themselves down with tools, any more than they have to have. It's a hundred to one

shot they'll go to the blacksmith shop and get what rough iron they need. I noticed a blacksmith shop down the line a few blocks. Is that the only one?"

"There are two more, but quite a ways out of the village."

"Well, they'll use this one, probably. You may see them when they go in there. If you do, don't bother them. Let 'em have what they want, and let 'em get into the postoffice before you jump 'em. You want 'em on Federal property, understand? — Lemme see your gun!"

With a trembling hand, Tom produced his pistol.

"Old fashioned cannon!" commented Cracknell. "That's all the better. These automatics have their drawbacks, Gilstar." The inspector broke open the revolver with a practiced hand, and squinted through the barrel. "You ought to keep it clean," he said, "but never mind — if you use it to-night, you can swab it out with a few chunks of lead. — Now, when I came into the postoffice a while ago, I was going to tell your postmaster about it, and have you two work together. But as soon as I lamped him, I saw that old goat would queer us to a fareyouwell. He's a human guinea-hen, Gilstar, I can see that. He wouldn't let 'em get within a mile of the office — and we don't want to scare 'em, we want to pinch 'em, see — And let me say right here, Gilstar, that if you make this pinch, you get all the credit for it. I'm not like one of these city bulls hogging all the headlines. Oh, man, you've got the chance of your life. You're going into the army — you've got the uniform on — why, Gilstar, they'll make you an officer on the rep you'll get out of this. Believe me, I'll boost for you."

"I'm — afraid I'm not equal to this sort of thing. You see — I —"

"Aw, you'll be great!" was the cheerful response.

"The minute I looked at you, Gilstar, I says to myself, 'This boy is good. He's the quiet kind that don't throw out his chest and wear a badge as big as a pie-plate, but he's big enough to strangle an ox, and he would probably bite 'em to death if he wasn't dragged off.'" Cracknell dug the big fellow cheerily in the ribs as he said this, and gazed at the khaki figure approvingly.

"Now, get me right, Gilstar. This dope may be all wrong. It may be they won't hit either here or Valentine. The Springhaven office is the big game, and there's where I'm going to be. Arber is first class, and Teague will be there.— But — if they do come this way, well, here's my advice:

"You better pick out some good man you can trust, here in Tredick, and have him along with you. You'd probably rather have all the credit — I know how a young fellow feels — I've been there — but all the same you'd better have a reliable man posted where you can use him quick — because these are bad men, Gilstar — and don't you forget that.

"You may have to use your gun, too. And let me tell you, Gilstar, if you do use it, don't use it to frighten. You can't scare these birds. If you shoot, shoot to kill. If you don't kill, they'll kill. Understand that. I've seen soft hearted and sentimental cops in my day — they're all dead now, and the cut flowers are dried up. So if you tackle this alone — I advise you not to — and see yourself getting in wrong — you better croak one of your men, and then the other will be easier. If you want me to, I'll send up a local man from Springhaven to help you — in case — eh?"

"I'm — I'm afraid I'm not equal to a thing — like this," said Tom, in a voice he scarcely recognized as his own.

Cracknell wheeled and looked at the big fellow. "You don't tell me you're yellow — got a yellow streak?" he whipped out, sharply and suspiciously.

"No, no," was the quick response. "No, sir! — I'll do my best, Mr. Cracknell." And as he spoke, Tom was startled at his own decision, implied in those words. Never before, when the suggestion had been thrown at him, sneeringly, that he lacked courage, had he thought it worth while to deny it. He had always taken the imputation lying down — what was the use?

But now — was it because those sharp eyes of the inspector were upon his khaki uniform? Was it because he was in a position where there was no retreat? For whatever reason, a little wave of strength and determination rolled in upon Tom Gilstar; and he listened now as though he were a police officer in purpose as well as in name.

Cracknell looked at his watch. "Well, I've got to get out of here!" he said. "I put this up to you, Gilstar. Maybe nothing will happen here. But if they come this way —"

Then he gave final and explicit directions as to what should be done, both in cornering and arresting the criminals, and afterward. A few minutes afterward the inspector was gone, and Tom went weakly into the house. He went up to his room and sat down on the edge of the bed. He wanted to be absolutely alone for a while. His whole knowledge of values, as he had learned them in a very sheltered and polite school, was worthless.

He was not only going to war — which he dreaded: he was going to kill a man, perhaps, this very night! It was war, on a small scale — in Tredick where nothing ever happened. It didn't occur to him at first that the man or the men might kill him. He merely went back to his earliest horror of violence.

This was war in Tredick. Certainly it was. The same principles were involved as in that murderous tornado which was sweeping over the whole world. Here were men who did not want to live in peace and honor, as Tom Gilstar did. They preferred to get a living by robbery — and murder if necessary. There, in Europe was a nation — the Prussians — who preferred not to live in peace and honor, or to advance themselves by innocent arts — but who had decided to bludgeon their way over the maimed bodies of men, women and children toward a goal of conquest. Should the other nations let them do it? If so, then why should Tredick be unwilling to let its money be taken and its homes be burned and its women and children tortured, at the hands of a couple of robbers?

Tom Gilstar had never used oaths very much. But now, in his mental torment he swore, and swore with a sense of awfulness. "By God!" he murmured, with clenched fists, "the only thing of any use any more is to prevent such things:—"

And how? He had no answer for that. But something had dawned upon him; something which made him feel older — not happier — and stronger; and it was the truth that the only peace mankind has ever had, has been bought with the suffering of strife.

"Oh, why can't they be honest and decent and merciful?" something within Tom Gilstar moaned. And the pitiless answer was:

"But they are not! What then?"

It lay on the bed beside him. A revolver. Its bright metal gleamed up at him innocently enough, as if it were a toy — as indeed a Belgian baby would take it to be, when it was pointed at its brown eyes by a Hun. And yet — it was a thing that, in a second, would stop a human heart.

Must that thing — that weapon, always be the ar-

biter of disputes between man and man? Then where was boasted Progress? Where was Civilization?

And there came then the answer, out of the fog of doubts and jumbled traditions and jangled nervous reactions:

Yes — and no. Yes — that thing — that weapon must be the arbiter so long as there are people — so long as there is one man — in the world, who understands no decision except that. So long as there is a nation without honor, without mercy, without any other conception of human destiny except that which may be won by Force — then that thing, there, is the arbiter.

But the world had been growing away from that — and there is such a thing as Progress — and the most that any murderer or murderers or nation or hunnish marauders can do, is to delay the march of Progress and Humanity. There is still a hope, far distant though it be, for a world of honor and decent aspiration toward justice —

— and to get to it, Tom Gilstar, you will learn to kill!

Those were the ideas that were reeling through Tom Gilstar's head as he sat on the edge of his bed. He got up and shook himself, threw back his shoulders and looked in the glass. He had never seen himself in the mirror before. Looked at himself — oh, yes. But he had never seen himself. He was really quite an old man, he thought.

"Good night, mother, I'm going now," he said as he left the sitting-room.

"Your voice sounds queer," said his mother, without considering it seriously, though.

"Does it? Well, I'm not the man you think I am," thought Gilstar, as he passed out.

Tom wondered as he walked down the street

whether he ought to get any one to help him — and if so, who would it be? He thought of a number of men — but they seemed, for the first time since he had known them, to be lacking in something needed. Immediately there flashed across him the notion that to seek another man to help him would be abetting some cowardice within him still.

No — alone! That was better. Alone! If he was a coward, nobody in Tredick would ever know it. And if he were not a coward, a man with the strength of right in his arm ought not worry about two men with the consciousness of wrong in their heads.

As Tom Gilstar was passing the dry-goods store lately purchased by Deacon Bradshaw, some one ran out behind him and uttered his name.

It was Alice Bradshaw. She was breathing hard, as though she had been running after him for a long distance, and there was a troubled, wondering look in her eyes which Tom observed at once.

“Tom, I’m sorry to bother you — it may be such a foolish question — I can’t help asking you, though. Is — your brother Sheridan — has he come home?”

Tom stared at the girl. “Sherry? Why, no, Alice. What in the world made you think —”

“Tom, please don’t say a word to any one, will you? I can trust you, Tom, I know I can. I’m not sure — but when father and I were driving home this afternoon, from Valentine, I saw two men near the road, just below the blacksmith shop. One of them looked like Sherry. I didn’t see his face; but don’t you know, Tom, you sort of remember how people look — as a whole — you know. Perhaps it wasn’t him. But I thought I’d ask you.”

Tom Gilstar shook his head. “No, I’m sure it couldn’t have been,” he answered.

But as he walked on, his nerves tingled and the blood

came rushing into his head and making his ears sing. Two men near the blacksmith shop! Two strange men they must have been — otherwise Alice would have known them. Cracknell had said —

“They’re here!” gasped Tom Gilstar. “Now, then!”

XI

THE clock in the woollen-mill struck twelve; and left behind it that noisy silence which always follows the breaking of silence. A few moments afterward Tom Gilstar, for the second time, went down the little alley-way on the North side of the postoffice building, and unlocking the side-door, let himself into the rear of the postoffice. It was quiet inside; the only noise was that of a mouse scurrying away under a pile of mail sacks.

The rear part of the office was just as it had been left when Henry Hobgood locked up. From the ceiling, about in the middle of the room, hung a single incandescent lamp, with a green-enameled conical shade. Under this was a long sorting-board, where the rural routes were made up. Directly across from the door where Tom entered, was another door, never used, which opened into the rear part of the Tredick Cash Market. This door was bolted and barred. A big old-fashioned safe was beside this door. The one electric lamp in the middle of the room was always left burning at night.

Having satisfied himself that the office had not been disturbed, Tom Gilstar went out again, and walked slowly toward the station. Two very distinct notions were in his head. One was a feeling of relief at the thought that eleven o'clock had passed, and nothing had happened. "They're not coming after all!" was his natural ejaculation.

But the other notion was a strong, unaccountable

intuition that some strange men were already in the village. True, he had seen no one. He had gone to the blacksmith shop, and found it, so far as he could ascertain, untouched. It might have been, of course, that this feeling was due to the words of Alice Bradshaw. But the notion, however it originated, was so insistent that when Gilstar walked toward the station, he went that way with the express purpose of throwing whatever eyes might be watching him, off their guard. And, instead of going to the station he jumped quickly aside in a dark spot, passed between two houses, vaulted a low fence, and came out in the rear of the postoffice again. Again he went to the side-door, put the key in the lock, and before turning it, paused to listen.

Meanwhile, during that short trip of the constable, something had happened on the other side of the post-office building.

First, the sliding door that led into the delivery shed of the Cash Market had slid gently back. A moment afterward there was a scraping and cutting sound at the unused postoffice door. Soon afterward a whole sash of the soft-pine door was out. There were two iron bars, the flat flanges of which were screwed into the doorframe on the postoffice side. A long iron bar ripped one end of these bars out of the wood as though the screws had been in putty. Then the bolt slid back, and two men stepped into the postoffice.

"Well, here's where they read the postcards!" said a voice, jocularly.

"How about that light? Here's the button," said another voice.

"No, don't touch that! You can't see anything from the street. That light is always left on."

"It's kind of handy to know the lay of the land."

"Yeh.— Get a lot of those empty sacks over there and that rug in front of the desk. All right, put the

bag down. We'll have to work fast to get back by one-thirty."

So, when Tom Gilstar came back to the side-door of the postoffice, for the third time, and put his key in the lock, and stood there listening, he thought he heard low voices within, and the movement of feet across the floor. He was not sure. His own heart spoke rapidly; and it might have been that. He turned the key and opened the door. As he did so, there was a "sssst!" from some one inside, and the next moment he was facing two figures crouched beside the safe.

The light from the one incandescent lamp was sufficient to show the figures of the men, and to indicate that all preparations were made for blowing the safe. It did not reveal the features of the men, who were in the half-shade back of the light.

What happened then, happened so quickly that a more inexperienced man than Tom Gilstar would have been equally helpless. For, as the big fellow's bulk loomed in the doorway — he was wearing a long light raincoat, such as he always wore on these yet chilly nights, and he had his revolver in the right hand pocket — a voice said, quickly, "The light!" And in a flash one of the men had reached up to the button on the wall beside the safe, which operated the drop lamp from the ceiling.

The room went into utter darkness. There, on one side of the room, were two men, confident of their advantage; and on the other side Tom Gilstar, straining his eyes uselessly against the blackness. He might have turned quickly and retreated through the doorway. Somehow he never thought of that. Instead, he cried, in a voice which sounded in his own ears pitifully unsteady:

"Who's there?"

For answer, a shaft of light jumped out of the sable

blanket before his eyes, and hit him full in the face. A shaft of yellow light, coming out of nowhere, as the searchlights of river steamers sometimes leap into the rooms of houses along the bank, made him wince. He drew back his head instinctively, then pulled it to one side to get out of the light. But the light followed him. He could see nothing but the incandescent twisted wire of the electric flash light; and into that yellow twist he had to look, whether he wanted to or not. The sweat came out on his forehead, cold. The helplessness of his position dawned upon him. Nothing in that room was visible except his face; and the men on the other side of the room had him at their mercy. If they wanted to shoot, he had no more chance than a butterfly in the net of a collector. They could pluck him at will. He felt that his eyes were staring wildly and foolishly, like the eyes of people he had seen in flashlight pictures. For an instant his mind seemed to detach itself from within him, and he could even see his own face, held brutally and singly into the foreground — spotted sharply as though it were thrust from a curtain.

Then, with a shock that couldn't have been caused by the report of a gun, there came out of the silent gloom a laugh. It was not an ill-natured laugh, but it sounded horrible. And a voice said, "That's enough, Hop! Turn on that light. There's nothing to be afraid of!"

There was a snap of the button, and the room was flooded with light. And, with eyes that still stared with straining eagerness, Tom Gilstar was looking into the face of his brother, Sherry Gilstar.

Both the men had risen. There was a grin on Sherry's face. There was a watchful, suspicious, ready — but complacent — look on the face of the other man. But on Tom Gilstar's face there was a

picture of the unbelief, the helpless recognition, the utter loss of self-possession, that was in the big fellow's soul. He articulated the word, "Sherry!" but he might as well have uttered any word. He had come to face two criminals who were going to rob the post-office — and he was gazing into the face of his own brother.

The fact that each of the men had a revolver in his hand, made no difference to Tom Gilstar then. He had a pistol in his own rain-coat pocket, which he couldn't have used had he known it would save his own life. His brother! Sherry!

Then came Sherry Gilstar's voice, not harsh, but carrying that old-time sneer which he had so often used in addressing Tom:

"Put your gat on the safe, Hop! We don't want to hurt *him*, you know. If you don't hold it, you won't use it."

As he said this, Sherry calmly laid his own revolver down on top of the safe. Hop Murray followed suit, and then looked inquiringly at Sherry.

"Sherry!" repeated Tom Gilstar, with effort. "You — it can't be —"

"Yes, it is, Tommy, old boy," was the reply, with a tinge of bravado. "I didn't expect you'd be around. I didn't think you'd have the sand to come in, even if you saw us here. You must be improving."

The sneer was unheard. "Sherry!" was the only reply. "I can't believe it! Not you! They told me —"

"Oh, don't get scared," went on the older brother. "I wouldn't hurt you for the world. But don't you begin to preach to me. I don't want to hear anything about what a terrible man I am, and how the church people will pray for me next Sunday. Cut it out, Tom. I'm damned if I know what to do, now. I

didn't figure you'd be around here, to break up our party. I thought we'd be able to break open this shoe box of Hobgood's and beat it."

Sherry looked at Hop Murray quickly as if a suggestion might come from him.

"Well, I don't know anything about your family affairs, Gillie," said the other man, "but either we'd better go to work or beat it. I don't want to hang around long enough to get pinched. That bull from the department may be coming along." Then he had a pleasant idea. "Why not bust the box, and sugar little brother with a piece of change?" he said, amiably.

Sherry laughed. "You don't know him. He don't know you, does he, Tom?" he said. "Tom's a good little boy. He wouldn't swipe a rotten apple. Did you hear what he said, Tom? Want to come in on the split?"

There was no reply. The big fellow was still staring, mired in this dismal swamp of mixed emotions. Finally he gasped:

"You wouldn't — you couldn't do this, Sherry! I won't believe it. Not you! You wouldn't come to your own home — it's a mistake — you didn't mean it, Sherry. Aw, Sherry, this is a joke! You just wanted to see what I'd do — how I'd act! You —"

"Don't be a fool, Tom!" was the quick answer. "You've got eyes. You can see what the game is, I may have hit the toboggan — I may be down and out — but I don't stall — I'm no hypocrite. I know what the town thinks about me, and they can go to hell. Let 'em have something to talk about!"

The dark-haired Gilstar turned to his companion. "Hop!" he said, "this is off. We can't put it over, without sending Tom to jail as an accomplice. I can't do that. We'll beat it, and the boy can say he scared us away. That'll sound all right. Maybe you'll pass

as a hero, Tom, if we take a sneak, and leave you with the safe, eh? I got nothing against you, Tom — only don't preach."

"Sherry!" cried the big fellow, with a bursting heart, "don't say that — not that way. 'You've got nothing against me.' Sherry! Is that all you — you think of us — of mother and Dolly and me — you haven't anything against us! Don't you care for us at all, Sherry? Don't you know we all love you — I don't care what you've done — what you're doing — we've all waited for you to come home — Sherry, there's something the matter — you wouldn't talk that way —"

"Cut it out — cut it out, I say," said Sherry. It was as though he purposely hardened his voice and attitude for the occasion. "You can't salve me, Tom. I got nothing against you, I tell you. But — I tried to come back to this town to make good, Tom, and you didn't want anything of me — you good guys — the deacon and the rest of the psalm-singers."

"You tried to come back —" began Tom. "When, Sherry? I didn't know —"

"Oh yes you did!" was the cutting reply. "Don't try to flam me with that stuff, Tom. You know all about it. Don't I know how things stand? After they ran me out of town, you were the white-haired boy — you were the good baby, nothing was too good for Tommy — and to hell with Sherry! Everything came your way — they always had a pat on the head for you, and a kick in the slats for me. I don't mean that mother — mother played any favorites; no, bless her soul, she didn't — but she couldn't stand against that bunch and they've probably made her think I belong in the gutter, too. And the only other one that thought anything of me — Oh, I hand it to you — you were the wise guy, Tom — I suppose anybody

would have done the same — you walked away with *her*."

"With *her*? I don't understand," said Tom, not knowing, of course, what the deacon had venomously hinted about Tom and Alice to Sherry; not knowing even that the deacon and Sherry had ever met since the last time the Gilstar family had heard of the missing one.

"Cut it out!" was the cold rejoinder. "You're not so simple as you look, Tom — and you can't put it over on me. I don't care now — I don't care. It was framed against me, and I fell for it easy, by being a bad actor. But let me slip this to you, Tom, before I get out: you never can make *her* believe — you never can—"

For some reason Sherry stopped short. He gulped something down, that came up in his throat, and turned to Hop Murray. "You see how it is, Hop," he said. "We can't put this over. We better beat it."

Then, suddenly, Sherry wheeled and looked at Tom. He was unwilling to leave it without a last bitter word. Month after month, since he had been summarily ordered out of town by Deacon Bradshaw, in the presence of the girl he loved, he had gone over the story in his mind, the sharp edges of it cutting him deeper and deeper all the time, his discomfiture being magnified; his boyish troubles being enlarged into persecutions. He had begun by feeling that he had done wrong — and that feeling had finally sent him back to Tredick to try it over again. But, being rebuffed, he now felt that all the wrong had been piled up against him.

And, in the person of his own brother, who stood before him, he saw a whole moving conspiracy. Had Tom not profited by Sherry's faults? Wasn't the rea-

son why they thought so much of Tom, that he was made to look better and better by the lies circulated about Sherry? This was what he thought, as he stood there, and he felt an uncontrollable hate for his big brother, which made him seize the lamp shade and turn the light full on the big fellow, to emphasize one last spiteful word.

He did flash the light upon Tom, but what he saw sent him back a pace or two and brought an exclamation of amazement from him. For Tom Gilstar had thrown back his raincoat, and he stood there, dejected, drooping, but clear cut in his khaki uniform. The hat, with its light-blue cord around it, Sherry saw for the first time. He had seen the hat, but thought it an ordinary felt. He had seen the puttees, but in the half-light they had looked like high hunting boots. Now, when he saw the unmistakable evidence, which his practiced army eye could easily verify, that Tom Gilstar was already in the army, he fell back and gasped:

“For God’s sake,—he’s enlisted!”

“What d’ye mean, enlisted?” came from Hop Murray.

“Yes, Sherry, I’ve enlisted,” said Tom, faintly.

For a moment, the two brothers looked at each other. Then a sneering grin appeared on Sherry’s face. “You!” he said — and now all the bitterness that had been accumulating in his mind leaped to his lips — “You, Tom! Ha, ha! That’s a corker! You! In the army! ha, ha! You’ll make a great soldier, you will. I s’pose they think you’re a hero, already, here in this burg. My God, Hop, look at the soldier! There isn’t a kid half his size but what could lick him. Tom, I don’t want to hurt your feelings — but for God’s sake, take those clothes off! I never was any hero, God knows, but when I was in the army, I didn’t

get the Gilstar name in bad by being a coward, that's a cinch. Take 'em off, Tom, and stay at home with the deacon!"

There was a barb in this spiteful talk that somehow tore under the flesh of the big fellow in khaki, and seemed to be groping for his very vitals. He saw the grin on his brother's face; the blood came pouring into his own face. He instinctively looked down at his own uniform. Suddenly for the first time, he was conscious of feeling something about that uniform — he hadn't felt it before. It was khaki — he had seen that — it looked pretty well on him — he had known that — but that had been all — except that he was resigned to service in the work that uniform called for.

But now there swept in upon Tom Gilstar something else. It was no mere khaki any more. It was a part of him — it was the bigger part of him — it was an over-soul, touching his. It was the badge of something he had not realized, but realized now — service and honor — the highest points the human soul can aspire to. It was not his pride that was being hurt with taunts, any more; it was not his body that felt any more torn with the barbs of irony; it was an insult to his very existence, for the khaki had come to mean the reason for his existence. Service — and honor! And it was being spurned, sullied, jeered.

"He's a little tin soldier, sure enough," commented Hop Murray, gayly, taking his cue from Sherry.

For reply, a red light came into the eyes of the big Gilstar. Seemingly without effort, he reached forth his hand, grasped Hop Murray by the neck and arm, shook him as a big Newfoundland would shake a cur puppy, then lifted him bodily and hurled him over the sorting table. Murray's body went like a limp rag. It struck the floor with a dull thud; there was a hollow crack, when Murray's head hit the planks — and he

lay there like a sack of meal, huddled up, with his knees drawn in.

It was a matter of a second or less. Sudden, impulsive as the blow was which crumpled Hop Murray into a sack of a man, grotesquely huddled in the corner, it was a long space of time compared with that instant decision which had taken place in Tom Gilstar's brain. Of course, the truth was that his decision was made not then, on the spur of the moment; he had been led up to it by slow degrees. But it was the snapping of some tangled cord of comprehension in him, that told him now that he was no coward, but a man, capable of doing a man's job, wherever that job should lead.

It was not that Hop Murray had insulted *him*, by calling him a tin soldier. It was that Murray had insulted something bigger and finer than *him*, which all that was best in *him* told him to defend. And so, not in a blind rage, but merely as a corollary to his conclusions, he throttled Murray and hurled him away.

And in that flash, that less than moment, something also told Tom Gilstar that he would fight Prussian murderers that way. That in such a way all clients of Force must be fought. That no advantage should be given; no opportunity lost to win — to kill if necessary — at least to defeat. All the sniveling spirit which had once told him to sacrifice himself rather than kill another man, left him.

He saw now that *not* to kill Prussians, is to be a Prussian.

The two brothers were looking into each other's eyes for just a second. Then, still obeying his new tactical impulses, Tom Gilstar swept the smaller man aside, grasped the two revolvers from the safe, and dropped them into an open mail-sack, which hung from the wall on hooks. It may have been an unnecessary pre-

caution. No doubt Sherry wouldn't resort to that! But it was all part of that good management which came to Tom Gilstar with the knowledge that he was a man.

Then Sherry Gilstar said, between clenched teeth, "What are you trying to do, Tom? Are you crazy. You know I don't want to hurt you, Tom."

The big fellow actually laughed. "Hurt me, Sherry? You can't hurt me. You can't frighten me any more. I'm in the army, Sherry, and I'm going to kill — kill! understand — kill! You don't know me any more, Sherry — I'm different from what you thought. Hurt me? Why, Sherry, it's *me* — *Tom* — that wouldn't hurt *you* — do you know that? See that fellow — that friend of yours — over there? Maybe he's dead. But I don't care — I don't care any more — I see things different now."

The pale, dark face of the older brother watched Tom Gilstar as he spoke. It was unbelievable! Sherry didn't believe it — he refused to believe. This big brother of his was a coward. He had always been a coward. Wasn't he afraid of getting his head under water when he was a boy — and didn't learn to swim? Hadn't he proved it on a hundred occasions? It couldn't be that he had changed! That blow which knocked out Hop — that must have been accident.

Something of the confidence was lacking, but there was still a note of irony in Sherry's tone, when he said, "Well, what are you going to do about it, constable? I suppose you think you could arrest us, or something like that?"

"Yes, Sherry," replied Tom, gravely, "that's my duty, and I'm going to do it."

"Don't make me laugh, Tom," was the reply. "You can't do it — you know you can't. You're just trying to make me think you've got the punch because

you landed a lucky one on Hop. You haven't got any sand — you know you haven't." Sherry was shaking his finger under the big fellow's nose, now, as though to bring him back to a sense of his own cowardice. "You never had any nerve — you know that. You can't arrest anybody. I'm going, now, see!"

It was probably a bluff, to see whether the incantation had succeeded. Sherry had no real intention of quitting the place without Murray. But he started to open the door behind him. A second afterward, he was pinioned by the shoulders from behind.

"Oh, is that it?" growled Sherry. He made a lunge to break away. He twisted and squirmed; tried to get his arms away from that silent, heavy-handed grip; tried to get a foothold that would let him throw his captor. He was wiry and well-trained, he had the advantage of army exercises. But he was in the hands of a giant. There are some people in the world who never have to take any exercises. They seem to be born with special strength in their muscles and tendons — and Tom Gilstar was one of them.

"I don't want to hurt you, Sherry," he said, "but — it's my duty," and slowly, surely, he let the smaller man struggle himself breathless and helpless in his arms.

It was not a fight; it was not a wrestling match; it was a strange struggle of one man in the steel arms of another — and queerly enough in the arms of a man who was watching all the time lest he hurt his captive, and whose eyes, meantime, were moist with emotion, and who was quivering — but not in fear. And when the big pincer-arms finally held a captive who no longer even fluttered, they lifted that captive up, as gently as a baby is lifted, and sat him on the edge of the sorting-table.

"Now don't start that again," puffed Tom Gilstar, "because it's foolish — you can see that, Sherry."

At the same moment, the huddled-up figure in the corner got up on one elbow and gazed at the two men by the table. There was a dark streak of blood running down from the forehead into the right eye of Hop Murray. His unclosed eye looked dazedly upon Tom Gilstar for a moment. Then he said, addressing Sherry Gilstar, in an accusing and disillusioned voice:

"Is *this* the guy you said was a soft boob, Gillie!"

Then Murray added, "Where am I, anyway? What's happened, Gillie?"

"You can get up now," said Tom to the prostrate man.

Murray looked at the big fellow wonderingly and dragged himself painfully to his feet, where he leaned against the wall and rubbed his sleeve over the blood-clogged eye. He couldn't understand. Too many things had happened since he went to sleep.

"I s'pose you think you've got us!" growled Sherry, at last.

"I've got to do my duty," was the grave reply. "I'm terribly sorry, Sherry. But I've got to do my duty."

Then a cunning look came into the smaller man's eyes. All the self-confidence had gone. He looked like an animal, trapped and trying to invent a means of escape. He stared at his brother, breathing hard. Then he said, in a low voice, "You can't pinch us, Tom! You can't do it! You know that as well as I do. You wouldn't send your own brother up — you know you wouldn't. Would you?"

There was no reply. Tom Gilstar was thinking hard.

"Besides," went on Sherry, with sudden eagerness, "you know — what mother would — you know you couldn't do it to *her*. You've got to let us beat it! She couldn't stand it, Tom — you know that. She

doesn't know — about me, does she? No! You wouldn't do anything to — hurt her, would you? It might kill her. You know that!"

There came into Tom's eyes, then, for the first time in all his dealings with his brother Sherry, a look of contempt. Of contempt! It was new. He had always been proud of Sherry. He had always thought of him as a hero. He had always defended him against the slurs of the townsfolk. But now he felt a contempt for Sherry. He had expected something bigger of him than this — just what, he didn't know — that he might fight, that he might be capable of self-sacrifice — but not this — not whining and hiding behind the skirts of their beloved mother.

He saw only too clearly, did Tom Gilstar — what it meant. Sherry was playing his last card. It might kill their mother! There was no doubt of that! He knew what Sherry — her first boy-child — meant to the mother. She thought of him as a hero. He had disappeared from her sight, but he lived in her heart. And to find that he was a felon — it wouldn't do. It would break her heart.

"You can't do it. You couldn't do it to her," went on Sherry, seeing his chance in the wavering of the other man. "You can let us get out of here, Tom; nobody'll really care. You scared us away — see? That's it. What do you care what they say, anyway? It won't hurt you. You've got to do it, see?"

Tom Gilstar threw back his shoulders. The intake of his breath sounded in the barish room. He saw the whole play, to the end. They would jeer at him. "He failed to do his duty!" No matter what he said, they wouldn't believe him. Everybody thought him a coward — that would be the word. He let his men get away. They'd all tell Gillis. At the army camp, they'd say, "Here comes the coward!" Cracknell

would say he had that yellow streak down his back. "Did you have a fight?" "No." "Did you fire a shot?" "No." "Just let them get away?" "Yes." "Coward!"

"He won't make a soldier. He was a coward as a policeman." Other taunts.

"You can't do it," Sherry was pleading. "You could do it, Tom. You've got to let us go."

The newspapers: "The postoffice of Tredick was broken into last night by robbers, who made their escape, though the constable, Tom Gilstar, was on duty and in the vicinity at the time. Gilstar recently enlisted in the army."

And there, at home, asleep, was she who loved them both — who believed heart and soul in this first boy-child, Sheridan Gilstar, and Dorothy, who was so sensitive and proud —

Tom Gilstar looked at his brother, heavy-eyed. He had known all along what he was going to do. He was going back to his old position in the town — the town coward. It seemed to be his place, after all — he would never rise out of it. He put out his hand and touched Sherry Gilstar on the arm — and in the quiet, tender way he had always had, in dealing with his family, he said, chokingly:

"Good-by, Sherry! You know I couldn't do anything else. I hope this is something you got into by mistake; it isn't *you*, Sherry; you weren't *this*; you weren't mean and low like this: and nobody at home will know. I — I can stand it — they've always called me a coward, and I've always stood it. Good-by, Sherry. I'm only sorry — you're not in the army. It did — it flashed in my mind once or twice that we'd wear the uniform together — and we might meet over there."

"You don't have to tell 'em the truth!" said Sherry.

quickly. "You can fake a good story that will put you right —"

"I wouldn't even want to take the trouble to lie about it. No; I'll tell them — but not who it was. Good-by. You'd better go now."

He put out a hand blindly. The brother looked at it, drew back a little, put out his own half-way, then pulled it back with a jerk and said, hoarsely:

"Come on, Hop! Quick."

Tom Gilstar didn't watch them go. He sat down on a chair and covered his face with his hands. He heard steps on the sidewalk outside. Then the place was still — very still.

"My God — our Sherry! Our own Sherry!" he moaned.

And after a while Tom Gilstar rose and went over to the safe. He took the sacks and put them back where they came from. He laid the rug down again in front of Henry Hobgood's desk, and smoothed it out. Then his eye fell upon a leather, saggy bag. He picked it up. It was very heavy. That bag he carried with him when he left the office. He walked with it to the bridge, over the Black River, and dropped it into the dark, chattering waters beneath.

Then he went to the telephone central and woke the night operator. He got the Springhaven police station, after a seemingly interminable delay.

"This is Gilstar, constable at Tredick. Is Mr. Cracknell there? I'd like to leave a message for him, then. Those — people came to-night. Broke into the postoffice. They got away. Yes, that's it, they got away. Yes, this is Gilstar himself. No; I don't know where they went. No; I don't even know the direction. YES; I KNOW IT; PROBABLY I AM. I'M SORRY. Good-by."

XII

Not a word was spoken by either Sherry Gilstar or Hop Murray, as they edged along the alleyway leading from the rear of the postoffice. The tall fellow followed Sherry by half a step, with that tacit knowledge of leadership he always displayed. They stopped for a second where the alley came out on the Main street. The coast was clear,—not a soul was stirring.

At the first intersecting street Sherry turned, and began to walk rapidly. Then Hop broke the silence by asking, "Are we going back with the crowd, Gillie?"

"I don't know, Hop," was the short reply. "We'll talk it over when we get clear of the village."

At the next intersecting street there was an electric light, and directly beside it a great elm. The men, striding along, were brought to a jerky halt at this tree, when an unexpected figure emerged from the shadow behind it, just as they had passed, and a trembling voice said:

"Sherry! That's you, Sherry?"

Gilstar turned with a nervous bound, and was looking into the face of Alice Bradshaw, a face made queerly pale in the lamplight. She wore a long storm coat which came to the tops of her shoes, but she had no hat on. Her hair caught the light rays; something in the texture of the hair, or the way the light fell upon it, or some real moisture in the air, made a thousand little sparkling points, like the sunlight on the dewy grass.

"I knew you were here!" she went on. "I knew you had come back."

"What are you doing, out here, at this time of night?" said Sherry, hoarsely. "What — how did you know —?"

"Oh, I saw you this afternoon. I knew it was you. I told Tom so; that is, I asked him if he had seen you. I haven't been to sleep, Sherry. I didn't expect to see you, but something was choking me, indoors, and I wanted to get into the air. Then I saw you two coming along. Your walk — I was sure it was you before you came into the light. And it was, wasn't it?"

In the pale light the man and woman looked into each other's faces. It was a long moment before Sherry Gilstar trusted himself to speak. In the background hovered Hop Murray, nervous, panicky, but silent. Suggestively, he coughed once or twice as a signal that they had better be on the move.

But Gilstar stayed. In his face was revealed, besides the surprise at seeing Alice Bradshaw here, at this hour, all the overpowering shame which was rising within him. His air of self-confidence was completely gone. In the encounter with Tom Gilstar it was not that his physical prowess had been worsted; it was that Tom had shown himself in every single way the bigger man. The coward was no longer the coward — and Sherry was no longer the man he had thought.

"You — mustn't stay here a minute," Gilstar strangled out, finally. "There's a light burning in your house, Alice —"

"Oh, yes, I left it on," she replied. "But father's sound asleep."

In the girl's face was the glad light of adventure, of freedom from the conventions of Tredick, of meeting Sherry Gilstar so unexpectedly. She only thought that

he had changed his mind, and was coming back to Tredick in spite of everything. She did not frame her emotions in words, but — she was looking into his face, and it meant much to her. Her lips were parted in an unexpected smile. She pulled the long coat tighter around her lithe figure, and snuggled into it with a little shiver of delight.

“It’s awful, isn’t it?” she burst out, with a ripple of daring fun. “This is the only time, Sherry, that I’ve ever been on the street, talking with you, without feeling that all Tredick was looking at us.”

Sherry did not respond to the notion. He said, huskily, “Alice, you don’t want to have anything to do with me. I’m in bad, now — you may know soon enough — and thank God I’m not dragging you or any other decent person along with me. I’m in wrong, Alice — understand? — and you don’t want to remember you saw me here — you don’t want to think anything more about me. I know all about it. Tom is the man — he’s a man — not a poor cheap crook — and you want to stick to him — I see that now — you’ll be happy with Tom —”

The girl drew back and peered into the face before her, trying to read this nonsense, as she saw it. “Why, what are you talking about?” she said quickly. “I don’t know what you mean. Tom? Your brother Tom? What have I got to do with Tom Gilstar? What are you talking about, Sherry Gilstar? Tell me, this minute!”

“Your father — when I was here before — he told me it was as good as settled, between you and Tom —” The young fellow stopped, dully.

“My father — Tom — why, it’s crazy, crazy, Sherry! You didn’t understand what he said. He couldn’t have said that. Everybody knows your brother Tom is in love with Tony Pillicy — every girl

in town is bursting with jealousy, Sherry, because Tom's enlisted and 'Tony is so happy about it — and — why, Sherry Gilstar, you've got everything muddled, I tell you! Your brother Tom is the kind that shows everything he feels, in his face — you must have heard from somebody that he's been trying to get 'Tony to marry him for ever so long. — I — I don't know what to make of it — that you should think —”

The young fellow put his hand out and touched her arm. “Alice! you mean that!” he choked out. “You — my God! I'm in wrong, I tell you — I've ruined everything I've laid hands on — I'm so much of a fool that I couldn't even go straight and succeed. What a fool! If I'd known that — it wouldn't — but it's no use now. I can't come back! I'm in too far. I'm sorry I ever saw you, Alice — I'm sorry, I mean you ever came to think I was a decent fellow. You don't want to talk with me another minute. I'll tell you right — I'm wanted by the police. Is that good enough? That's the kind I am, Alice. I'd rather have you hear it from me —”

All the adventurous joy that was in her eyes gave way to pain and pity. She seized his hand. “No, no! You don't mean that, Sherry!” she said in a breaking voice. “I don't believe it!”

“It's true,” was the answer. “Now, do you see —” He tried to disengage her hand. She was clinging too tightly. It made him wince — that pressure.

“Wait!” she said, in one great sob. “You can't go this way, Sherry. You can't leave it that way. I know you — I know you better than you know yourself, Sherry, indeed I do. You won't run away, now that the country — our country is calling for you. You were in the army; I tell you, Sherry, I thought when I saw you here this afternoon that you had heard Tom was going to France and it had brought you back

to enlist. I was so happy. I wanted to be the first one to see you and talk with you. I wanted them to know — all of them — my father — everybody — what you really were. I wanted to see you in the khaki, like Tom — only it would be *you* — and have that to remember in the days to come. Sherry! You can do it! I don't care what's happened! You can make it right — please listen to me, Sherry —”

“No. It's too late. I ought to have thought of that before. I can't stand this. I'll crack — I'll go to pieces,” moaned the man. Then he took the hand that detained him, and with gentle force, put it away from him. “Quick, Hop!” he muttered. He wanted to do something — there was the crying need in his wrenched soul, to lay it on the ground and have it trampled. As quick as lightning he had seized the girl's coat, pulled it up to his lips —

And he was gone. She heard their feet hurrying along the tar-walk.

“My God, Hop! My God!” moaned Gilstar, as they fled along.

“Go easy, kid,” was the reply, with real feeling. “Don't let it get to you so hard. I know how you feel — but brace up. We've got to make our get-away!”

A sobbing breath was the only reply. But a second afterward, Sherry Gilstar stopped. “Go on, Hop,” he said. “I'm done. Give us your hand, pal. I'll tell you how to get back to the big barn, where you'll catch the crowd. I don't want to be a quitter, but I'm done. And I don't want to queer your chances.”

“What's the matter? What are you going to do? You can't stay here!” cried Murray. “Brace up, Gillie!”

“I'm done, I tell you!” gasped Gilstar. “My nerve is gone. I don't care whether they get me or

not. I'd just as soon they would. You've been a good pal, Hop, and — you better beat it alone. You can get under cover in New York. Don't be afraid I'll squeal. Nothing like that."

"Quit and leave you here, Sherry!" said the other man. "I should say not. What do you take me for? I'd feel better doing a stretch along with you, Gillie, than carving a steak down at Daly's alone, and counting a roll.— But what's the use of the sour stuff, now? Why can't we go back together? If the crowd has —"

The two men were facing each other on the dark country road. They could not even see each other's faces. But, gropingly, in the dark, Sherry Gilstar's hand sought and found Hop's shoulder. And he said, with finality:

"There's nothing to it, Hop. You'll be a fool to stay with me, that's all. What happened up in the postoffice, and on the street back there, has finished me. You can't see it — I don't expect you to. But Tom, back there, has put it all over me. I'm the coward, Hop! It's Tom that showed the sand in the pinch. The yellow streak I thought was in Tom is running down my own back! Did you notice his face when he told us to get out! It was big, big! something bigger in it than you or me ever showed, Hop. And I sold out my own mother, to get away, understand? Understand, Hop — sold her out! He handled me like a baby, Hop — like a five-year-old kid — but I don't mind that. By God, something makes me proud of the big boy, that he was able to do it. It's the other thing — the big thing — taking the whole chance on himself — that's what's done for me.

"And did you notice what he said, Hop? We called him a tin soldier, didn't we? I told him to take off the uniform and not disgrace it! I told him that!

Hop, it's you and me that's disgraced the uniform. We've thrown it in the mud and jumped on it! The good old khaki, Hop, that used to set us up when the band played — what have we done to it?"

"We're in bad. I guess you're right," echoed Hop Murray, mournfully. "We're in bad, Sherry."

Gilstar went on as though he had not heard his companion. "I thought I was a wise guy, Hop, that's the trouble. I thought I knew a whole lot more than anybody back there. If I hadn't been a fathead, I wouldn't have fallen for that yarn of Deacon Bradshaw's about — about the girl and Tom. When a fellow knows he isn't going straight and clean, he'll believe anything that will give him a license to steal. Now it's Tom that's going out in the khaki, and I'm shooting the chutes towards the hoose-gow. Do you see, Hop? Do you see why I'm all in? I can't stand it, I tell you. I'm going to crawl into the nearest hole and pull it in after me."

"Listen, Gillie!" said Hop, suddenly. "They haven't got the goods on us! Your brother Tom won't squeal, will he? I'll follow you anywhere you want to go. I'm as sore on this stuff as you are. Why can't we beat it to the nearest rookie station and enlist? For your life, they'll grab us. They want regulars. We can lose ourselves in the army. We'll be 'over there' in a month or so. I'm game. What do you say?"

"No. It won't go," said Sherry, dismally. "They've got our number. That postoffice bull won't let go as easy as that. They'll be asking questions we can't answer. No — it won't work."

"But couldn't we go up and tell 'em we've been traveling wrong, but we want to get back in the army? They need men. Suppose we said we's seen the right thing to do — we never killed anybody — we only

pulled a little night work — we'll tell 'em we've reformed —”

“It won't go, I tell you!” Sherry almost screamed. “Didn't we read in the paper the other day about a judge telling a fellow he'd put him on probation if he'd join the army? And what did the army men say? They said, ‘We don't want the dirty mutt. We want clean, decent men in the army. We're not running any reform school, or penitentiary.’ And they're right, Hop. That's the way we'd have felt if they'd offered us a bunch out of Sing-Sing, when we were in the army. We might have been a little rough, but we were clean then. No, it's all off, I tell you.”

“Then there's nothing to do but go back with the crowd,” added Hop.

“Not on your life. I tell you I'm done. I'm done with this business along with the rest.”

“Well, what are you going to do? You can't sit here till somebody comes along with the wagon!”

There was a long silence. Or it seemed long, to both men. Then Gilstar's hand was clapped on Hop's shoulder, this time with an inspirational wallop back of it. His voice tingled with emotion as he said:

“Hop, I've made up my mind what to do. I've got just one chance to square myself. I'm going to take a chance on earning a stretch. I don't ask you to come in on it. You'd be a fool to risk it, just on account of what I think. But I'm going to make good with that brother of mine, if it takes my last breath. And I'm going to make good with the old U. S. A. at the same time. Listen, Hop! If a fellow is in a place where he needs a whole bath, all over, and there isn't enough water, he can wash his face and hands, anyway. That's the way I feel. Your dope about getting back to the army is right, Hop. That's where I'm going. Maybe they won't turn a man down who

comes in of his own accord, and tells the truth. Maybe they'll send me up for a year or so. All right; I'll do my stretch like a man, and I'll come out clean. I might hit a judge who would let me down easy. I'm going to take a chance."

A hand found one of Gilstar's hands, and gripped it.

"Gillie!" said Hop Murray. "I'll go with you! I'm just as strong for the army as you are. When we saw a bunch of rookies going away, down in New York the other day, I wanted to be with 'em. I didn't say anything to you about it; but something grabbed me inside; I could hear the old bugle calling, Gillie; I wanted to be back there where you cuss the reveille but you turn out just the same and feel glad of it, and where you grab your tinware and form in line, hungry as a bear, when the eats are passed, and where you swipe your bunkie's package of alfalfa, but you'd go to hell for him if he's the right kind. I was thinking about all those things before we tied up with Louis and the crowd, after you and me got thrown out of Tredick by the deacon that day —"

"You did! My God, Hop, why didn't you say so then?" cried Gilstar. "If you only had tipped me —"

"Well, Gillie," was the reply, "I always figured you had the brains of the party; you know that. I saw you were dead set on getting back with something snappy against your old town, because the girl's father had thrown you down, and — what could I say? I wasn't strong for this crooked work, Gillie, that's the truth. I've been ready to quit any time. I don't want to rub it in, old man, but when you framed this idea of coming back and blowing the postoffice in your old burg, I thought it was pretty raw. I didn't want to say anything. It was all your funeral, I figured —"

"Don't!" cracked out Gilstar. "I can't stand it, Hop! I can see it, now! Raw is no name for it. It

was the lowest down thing a man ever did.— But there's something worse we've done, Hop, and that's what I'm thinking of now. We've dragged the old khaki through the mud. My God, Hop, that's what I can't bear to think of! You remember the oath we took! And it wasn't the oath so much, as what they meant and what we meant when they gave us the uniform. Hop, will they give us a chance again? Will they?"

"I'm willing to risk it."

"Give us your hand on it, Hop."

"Here, Gillie!"

"Where do we go from here?" said Murray, after a silence. "There's no use chasing back to the crowd. We better camp here till light, hadn't we?"

"No!" said Gilstar, at once. "We're going straight now, Hop. Let's start by being square even with that bunch of crooks. We can't put Louis in dutch by not showing up and making him hang around waiting till maybe it's too late. We don't want to be crooked even with him, now."

"But what are you going to say when we get there?"

"I'm going to cash in and walk away a white man. We'll tell Louis we're through. We'll tell him we're going to enlist—but we won't squeal on the crowd, Hop—we'll never do that. Come on!"

"All right, Gillie. But just the same I think we'd better stay here."

Hop had no more to say, however, and as Gilstar seemed to have made up his mind, they stumbled along together.

XIII

THE last quarter of the moon had sailed up out of the east, like an orange-colored, lop-sided balloon. At first it peered through the dark fringe of trees on the horizon like a farm-house afire. It gave little light; a stranger in the country would not have been helped by it; but Sherry Gilstar had tramped every foot of the ground. A few minutes later they were cutting across a plowed field, every furrow of which reached out to trip them. Twice the city-born Murray went full length on the ground, and cursed in a half-angry, half-humorous way that was characteristic of his good nature. Suddenly they saw dimly the outlines of a big structure, and at the same moment came abruptly against an automobile, cleverly backed into the cover of woodside-brush.

"Easy, now!" whispered Gilstar to his companion. "They're here! See if you see a light in the barn!"

No light was visible. They got upon the highway, which they had approached at right angles, and stood listening. Then Gilstar whistled twice. A second afterward he whistled again.

There was an answering whistle. Then, in the darkness made just a little less dark by the rising moon, a figure appeared at the corner of the barn, and a low voice came to them: "Is that you, boys?"

In response to their word of recognition, the figure came toward them. "Where have you been all this time?" said the man with an oath. "Did you think we were going to stay here the rest of our lives?"

Come on quick, and bring the stuff. Hell's broke loose! Jakey's squealed on us; he was planted before we came! But he won't squeal any more. Harry croaked him back there in Arber, when the shooting began —"

"Killed Jakey? Harry killed Jakey?" gasped Gilstar, turning cold.

"You bet your life! And I think we got one of the bulls, too. Believe me, there's a riot on. There was a whole posse there waiting for us. We'd have walked into 'em, if Jakey hadn't been so anxious to get away from us. I had my suspicions of that ——— all the time. Come on quick, now. It's damn lucky you know the country, Gillie! I've got ten gallons of gas in the car, but we can't waste any of it."

While he was talking, this speaker, a short, stocky man, with great breadth of shoulders, had been walking toward the rear of the barn. Like most barns in the vicinity, this one, long deserted after the house had burned, was built on a hillside, so that in the rear was a sloping cellar in which hogs had been kept, long years before. One side was open, the others were walled with stone. At the rear, hanging from a nail, was a lantern, the globe blackened on one side by an uneven wick, which spit and hissed. In the ghastly rays of this one light, the four figures — the fourth man was standing by the back-wall, behind the lantern — seemed to have no faces, but just white patches between shoulders and hats.

Louis the Blacksmith turned nervously to the newcomers when they were in the cellar. "Where's the stuff?" he croaked, savagely. "Where is it?" And his eyes were seeking a mail-sack in which the plunder from Tredick postoffice should have been brought. "Did you see any registered?" he added.

"We just barely got away," answered Gilstar.

"They caught us dead, in the postoffice. We didn't even have a chance to get to work."

There was no face visible to show emotion on the part of the leader, but a snarl, like that from a caged beast, showed how he received the news. "You lie, Gillie!" he ground out. "Don't you try to hold out on us! Where's your bag! You've hid it somewhere, with the stuff! It won't work! Murray, where's that stuff? Quick, now; you can't put nothing over on us. Jakey tried that!"

"Gillie's right!" said Hop Murray, eagerly. "That's the truth, Louis! We got away with our skins, that's all. We wouldn't hold out on you if we had anything."

"You lie!" came the reply, in an unrestrained fury. "You said it was an easy place to break. You said the cop there would be asleep. You know that burg too well to get caught. Come on with that stuff! Where is it? Do you want to wait here till we get pinched?"

"I'll tell you the truth, Louis," said Sherry Gilstar. "We got nothing. We were caught right, I tell you. We beat it back here to tell you something else. Something's happened—no use trying to tell you—but we're going to quit the crowd. We're done; but we wanted to quit right. We're going to enlist in the army, both of us. You needn't be afraid of us squealing. We don't know a thing—never saw you or Harry or anybody. So you can leave us here. I'll tell you any road you want to know. But this stuff is all off, for us."

The reply was a horrible laugh, a mirthless guffaw fit to dry up the marrow in a man's bones. "You got one more think, you poor simp!" rapped out the broad-shouldered man. "Don't try to put that over on me. How long did it take to think that up, you

two boobs! We've put away one squealer to-night, and don't you forget it! Enlist in the army! Where's the stuff? What have you done with it? Come on, now, quick, Gillie. Have a look at this!"

Something flashed before Sherry's eyes. He knew what it was. He knew that he was looking at a dark spot where death was crouched ready to leap for his eyes. It flashed into his head, for the first time since they left the postoffice, that neither he nor Hop Murray had their guns with them. They were back there in that mail-sack where Tom had dropped them. They had been so busy wrestling with the future that they had never considered the revolvers. Nor had Gilstar reasoned out what Louis would do, when they met.

Now Gilstar saw, too late, what he should have been prepared for. The leader of the crowd, almost beside himself with the turn matters had taken — driven into a corner by the very fact that both he and Allen were probably already murderers, was ready for anything.

Yet, this time, facing his second encounter of the night, Sherry felt an inflow of strength — not merely of courage, for he had enough of that — but of a strength that came from somewhere outside and beyond himself. In the grip of his brother he had felt weak; he had not been able to exert himself; there was something lacking. Now, conscious that a tube of steel was ready and willing to vomit lead at him, he was even buoyant in his manner. He said, evenly:

"Wait, Louis. Don't do anything foolish. I've told you the truth. So has Hop. We got nothing at the postoffice. You know I'm no squealer. We needn't either of us come back here if we wanted to double-cross you. You can see that, can't you? We came back because we wanted to play the game right, and then quit. I'm not preaching at you or any one

else, Louis; every man's got to see it for himself. Hop and I — we've seen it. We're done with this. We're going back in the army — if we can get there. There's something doing, Louis, that we haven't been thinking of, because we've been thinking about what we could get for ourselves. But the old flag is grabbing for us, and we're going back. That's all."

"Is that all?" was the sneering answer. "The old flag is calling, is it? You think you can put that over on me, do you? I always knew you two pups were yellow. Want to sneak back and peel potatoes for the gov-ment, eh? Why, you poor nuts, I'll show you what flag is grabbing for you. I'll stuff a flag down your squealing throat that'll hold you just as hard as the dirty American rag you seem to think so much of —"

The pale yellow light flashed along the nicked barrel of the revolver as it wavered ever so slightly. In that infinitesimal part of a second Gilstar knew that the man who faced him was driven desperate, and was going the limit. Louis was more afraid of being squealed on, now, than of being a murderer a second time. It may have been imagination, or it may have been a glint of intuition, but Sherry thought he heard the faint metallic click of the release spring of the bandit's automatic. It was time to act, and he acted with the instinctiveness of an animal. With a lunge that was at once an instantaneous poise and forward movement, he plunged head first at the abdomen of the leader.

As his head sank into the vulnerable spot, Gilstar felt the bones of his neck creak and bend with the impact. The concussion sent a tremor along the spinal cord which carried nausea into his stomach. But at the same time he shot up his left hand to catch the arm

which held the pistol, hoping to dash the weapon loose from the blacksmith's hand.

With a hollow groan, such as might have come from a base-drum, tapped gently in a bar-room, Louis went flat on his back. The terrific blow would have counted out an ordinary man. But the blacksmith was no ordinary man. His build was that of a cave-man, long ape-like arms, and a tough animal-like hide, free from the ordinary human sensitiveness. Besides, Sherry had hit him a trifle too high. The result was that Louis went down, but the wind did not go wholly out of him, and the pistol clung to his right hand.

When the blacksmith went over, Sherry Gilstar went with him. He sprawled headlong on his antagonist, and lost his grip on the gun-arm he was trying to hold. His right hand, in that moment when the man under him was sucking in his breath, went to the bull-throat, and tried to get a grip on it. But it was a throat that was too big for any Gilstar hand. It was a throat that heaved inward and outward with each breath — that was like a ball of India-rubber to the touch of the fingers. There seemed to be no place to get hold of it. He heard the man under him gasp and cry: "Don't shoot, Harry!" as a warning to the fourth man in the cellar, whom he expected to come to his aid as a matter of course. "Get him off."

At that moment Gilstar's left hand struck something cold — slid along over it to a big wrist. He let go the neck with his other hand, and clung to this wrist with both. And in that moment he knew that he was no match for this astounding animal writhing beneath him. The wrist began to curl inward toward him. He exerted all his strength against it. He could feel the muscles, like live snakes crawling inside a burlap-bag — it was precisely like trying to hold snakes in

that way. He felt that the gun was coming in toward him and he couldn't stop it. And yet, in that instant, he felt strangely satisfied. With possibly only another minute of life left to him, he whispered to himself.

"Not so bad, Sherry; not so bad, after all."

And the sentence, which had no meaning to anybody else in the world, meant a whole world to Sherry Gilstar. He felt that he was going out a whole lot cleaner than he had been traveling for a long time.

There was a quick flash before his eyes, accompanied by a nervous kick that went through every nerve of his body. There was a sound that was not the crack of a pistol, as the ears expect to catch it; it was rather the sound that might be made by slapping a bolt of heavy cloth with a yard-stick. There was a sensation in his left shoulder as though a drop of hot water had fallen on the skin — nothing more painful than that — though the drop seemed to radiate heat for several inches around where it had fallen. Then his head suddenly became very warm, and he felt as though he were slipping — slipping off a roof somewhere, and though he tried vainly to hold on, there was nothing his fingers or toes could catch. . . .

"This is IT," he was conscious of saying, "and it isn't bad at all; not bad at all."

Something hammered once near his face; hammered once more; a few more drops of hot liquid fell on his nose and cheeks.

And suddenly the man underneath him went as limp as Sherry Gilstar felt. At the same time Hop Murray's voice came out of the distance — twelve miles away, at least — saying:

"He's got his, Sherry. He didn't get you, did he? My God, Sherry, he didn't get you, did he?" And then Sherry felt himself being lifted to his feet.

"No, no — nothing's the matter," Sherry was re-

plying, mechanically. "What's happened, Hop? I don't understand."

"Oh, I just put Louis to sleep with the butt end of this!" said Hop, cheerfully. "Funny how easy it was to take the fight out of him by tapping him on the conk a couple times."

Murray dragged Gilstar up to the light. "You've got blood on your face!" he cried. But he added, with relief. "Oh, I see. Just a few spatters off Louis's head. It's all right."

Sherry Gilstar leaned against the stone wall. He passed his arm over his face dreamily, and muttered, "Thought — you — we both lost our guns in the post-office, Hop."

"Yeh. We did, Sherry. That was careless of us. This was Harry's gun. There's Harry asleep over there. He ain't much hurt. I just fanned him one under the ear when I saw you mix it with Louis."

"Hop, you saved my life!" murmured Gilstar.

"Forget it," was the reply. "I just had a chance to get back at you for what you did for me out in the Islands. That is, I've just begun to pay up. I'm tickled to death about it.— I'll tell you how it was, Sherry, old boy. When you were talking with Louis, there, I knew something was going to happen. All of a sudden it occurred to me that your baby brother back in Tredick had frisked us for our guns. It didn't look good at all. I could see from the expression on Harry's face that he and Louis had talked it all over in advance. Louis was trying to pick a quarrel. I'd bet my last dollar they were waiting for us to come back with the stuff, and then give us a couple of stiff wallops and beat it alone. So when I saw you peel off that goat trick on Louis, I figured it was time to do something. Harry had his eye on you two; so I just reached over and passed him a few stars. Then, when

Louis was getting rough I thought I'd better lay him out.— Now it's up to you, Sherry. We'd better beat it out of here while they're asleep, hadn't we?"

The lethargy fell from Sherry Gilstar. He reached out and grasped Hop's arm. A great inspiration was glistening in his eyes, under that feeble lamp. "Hop," he cried, "we're in right, for once! The luck was broken for us at last! Is there any rope around here — anything to tie up these two birds — anything — look around! An old chain! Anything they use on a farm! What's that hanging from that hook? No: that's a cobweb! Look over there! Isn't that a rope?"

"Yes, this is a rope," replied Murray, bringing down the dusty, webby article at which Sherry was pointing. "But what's the game, Sherry? We don't want these lobsters for souvenirs, do we? Let's leave 'em here to find their own way home."

"You don't understand, Hop! It's all coming our way. We came here to do the straight thing, and Louis wouldn't stand for it. He tried to climb out of here over our carcasses, Hop! We'll turn the same trick on them. These men are going to help us to go right, now.— Tie 'em up, Hop; something's the matter with my left arm, it feels numb.— Louis must have wrenched it someway. Make it binding on Louis, Hop; he's a human ox, believe me. When you get him properly trussed up, you better look in the toolbox of the jitney out there, for some more rope, or chains.— We can't let 'em get away, now. I tell you, Hop, we're going to climb out of this rotten business on their shoulders. It's the fortune of war, Hop; nothing sneaky about it. They had their chance, and we — you — beat them to it. Now it's our turn."

"You mean we're going to march 'em in to the town

and turn 'em over to your brother," shouted Hop, as the idea dawned on him.

"You said something! Tie 'em up, Hop, and make no mistake about it. They're worth their weight in gold to us. I wouldn't swap Louis and Harry here for all the plunder in the world. They've shown us the way to come back and all we got to do now is to cash in and follow it!"

And thus it was, that at half past six in the morning, a few early risers along the road that led into Tredick, saw four men marching, two abreast, headed townward. The two men in front sometimes stopped, as if to argue a point — and then, as if the argument failed in the face of a bigger argument from behind, the procession moved along again. Both men in the front line had their hands behind their backs. From time to time the two men in the rear burst into a marching song — a song negligible enough in itself, perhaps, but made known from one end of the world to the other by khaki-clad men who had sung it with an honest will. It was to the effect that there would be a hot time in the old town that night.

XIV

THE sole idea in Tom Gilstar's head as he paced his lonely round of Tredick streets until daylight that morning, was that he was going away. There was a melancholy satisfaction in that. In another three days he would be in camp somewhere; and not long after that he would be on his way to France.

To France! No longer did the dread of crossing the ocean and of being thrown into that maelstrom of war, oppress him. It seemed even desirable. To get away, anywhere — that was the idea. And he felt that when the time came, he would show them — or show himself, at least — that he could fight and die like a man.

Yet he dreaded the next few hours that were to come. He knew that the whole ground would be gone over; the panel out of the side door of the post-office, the bars wrenched from their places; the questions that would be hurled at him; the sneers, ill concealed or not concealed at all; the inevitable charge of cowardice. What did it all mean, anyway? What was this net of destiny that was drawn so mercilessly around him? He felt like a man who has laboriously worked his way to the top of a deep well, stone by stone, toe-hold by finger-hold, only to grasp at a loose stone at the top, and go crashing down to the bottom again.

And Sherry! That was a nightmare. He didn't dare to think of it. Sherry, of whom he had been so secretly proud — who had seemed to carry something of knightly chivalry about him — appearing in the guise of a common thief, and willing to save his skin by the meanest of all mean devices! The good fellow

simply put the picture out of his mind. He couldn't grapple with it; and he had so long been the carrier of burdens that he faced this new disgrace with a dull fortitude and a sealed mouth. Whatever happened, Tom was determined that his mother and sister should never know. They believed that Sherry was coming back some day with honor. Let them go on believing it!

At six o'clock Tom Gilstar knew that his mother was already stirring in the house, as she was always an early riser. There was no telephone at the Gilstar home, but the next-door neighbor had one, so Tom went into the Town Hall, and called the Werdens. "Will you please tell my mother," he said, "that I won't be home at the regular time this morning. Tell her it's nothing important, but I've got a little business down town to attend to. I'll probably be home some time in the forenoon."

As Tom came out of the Town Hall, and locked the door after him, he saw Sergeant Gillis just lighting a cigarette on the porch of the hotel, opposite. Frequently the two had gone to breakfast together, at Mrs. Gilstar's, at this hour. So Gillis walked across the street, and after returning Tom's salute, said, cheerfully:

"All ready to go to breakfast?"

In the next moment, however, after he had glanced at Tom's face, the other man asked, "Why, what's the matter, Tom? You look as pale as a ghost. Not feeling sick, are you?"

"Oh, no; there's nothing the matter. But I don't think I'll go down home just yet. I don't feel hungry, somehow. Just telephoned my mother I wouldn't be down till later."

The officer looked at the big fellow keenly. "Don't try to kid me," he said good-naturedly. "You're wor-

ried about something. I guess I know how you feel. You're thinking that you've got to go away from here pretty soon. But you don't want to feel that way, Tom. You'll get acquainted with the other fellows quicker than you think. It's hard the first day or two. You don't know anybody, and it seems as if you never would. At the end of a week you know half your company by their first names, and everybody has tried to borrow money of you.—I'll wait a while, and we'll go down together. Come on over to the office and have a smoke, and you'll feel better."

"No; it isn't that," protested Tom; but he was glad, somehow, of the company of this soldier for whom he had acquired a real respect.

They went upstairs to the recruiting office. It was cold and damp in the room, and a lingering odor of cigarette smoke whiffed at them as they opened the door. Hardly had they seated themselves when there was the whirr of an automobile engine, as it was stopped, outside. Sergeant Gillis went to the window and looked out. Then he threw up the sash.

"Hello!" cried a man by the side of the automobile, looking up at the window, "where can I find the constable—Gilstar or whatever his name is? I've just come from his house and they told me I might find him around the square here."

"Why, he's right here," replied Gillis. Then turning to Tom he said, "Somebody down there looking for you. Shall I tell him to come up?"

Before Tom Gilstar could reply, there was the sound of the caller's feet on the stairway. Tom jumped to his feet. He had no doubt as to the identity of the man in the automobile. He turned toward the door without a word, and waited. There was a perfunctory knock, and the door was thrown open. Inspector Cracknell strode in.

All the anger, disappointment and mortification of a man who has seen his best laid plans set at naught, and his reputation placed in jeopardy, were depicted in the inspector's face. His eyes, commonly impassive and metallic, encompassed the big fellow before them, with cynical asperity. Two red spots flared at the cheek bones, and the bristly mustache twitched as he framed the contemptuous words:

"Well, you've made a nice mess of it, you big boob! I never trusted a hick cop yet but he threw me. Had 'em in your grip, and let 'em get away, didn't you? What tree did you take to, Gilstar, when they threatened to slap your face? You big boob! You haven't got the nerve of a rabbit! I s'pose they took everything under their arms and walked away with it, didn't they?"

Sergeant Gillis was staring at the man all the while, understanding not a bit of it. He looked from the inspector to Tom. He saw Tom standing stolidly, with averted eyes and downcast head. All the sergeant could understand was that his big recruit was being "bawled out," as he would have said, by a stranger. And the sergeant didn't like that. He walked over to the stranger and stuck his square jaw toward the vehement face.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!" cried Gillis. "What do you think this is, a bar-room? What d'ye mean by coming in here and insulting this soldier? Go home and tell your troubles to your family.—What's he mean, anyway, Tom? Ever see him before?"

"I'm a postoffice inspector — get that!" roared the stranger. "My name is Cracknell. I'll show you —"

A finger shot out under the nose of the detective, and shook there warningly. "I don't care if you are the whole postoffice department," said Gillis,

quietly. "This is the recruiting office of the United States Army, and I'm in charge of it, and I'll give you ten seconds to get on the other side of that door,—and you get *that*."

"I tell you —" began the inspector, in a milder voice, and reaching for the door-knob prudently. But Tom Gilstar interrupted, saying in a heavy voice that sounded almost devoid of interest:

"No, sergeant, this gentleman is — I mean he means all right. It's true, I let them get away — they broke into the postoffice here last night, and they got away — two men — but they didn't take anything."

"Broke into the postoffice last night — here?" echoed Sergeant Gillis. "Great Snakes, and I was asleep!"

The sergeant's sole regret, as the news came to him, seemed to be that an exciting episode had occurred while he was asleep, and nobody had had the decency to wake him up. Then he went on, reflectively, "So that's why you looked so gloomy this morning, was it? Why didn't you tell me about it? — All right, inspector, sit down and have a cigarette, and keep your shirt on. I guess you've had 'em get away from you sometimes, haven't you?"

"You may think it's a joke, but it isn't," growled Cracknell, pacing up and down the floor nervously. "My running mate, Jim Teague, is in the hospital down at Arber, with a bullet in his right lung, and they croaked one of their own crowd who was working for me. And there are four of them, desperate men, somewhere in the country round here. Two of them were here, and this man Gilstar let them get away from him."

"And how many got away from *you*?" asked Sergeant Gillis, blandly.

The sarcasm sent the color into the inspector's face.

"That's all right," he ground out. "You think you're smart, I suppose. But these two who came here were a couple of raw boys who could have been rounded up easy. I was in Springhaven, myself. The two older yeggs went after the office at Arber, instead. I don't know how they got away. But there was a fight down there, all right. Up here it was different. I tell you, sergeant, I charge this man Gilstar with cowardice! I never knocked any man for putting up a stiff fight, and losing. But I tell you, this man is yellow. What did he telephone to me at Springhaven? I've got the message right here just as it was written down at the police station.

"*'I don't know where they went,'* Cracknell went on. *'I don't know the direction they took.'* That got the goat of the desk man at the station, and he says he charged Gilstar here with being yellow and ducking a fight with them, and this guy admitted it. He said, *'Yes, probably I am.'* You can't deny it, Gilstar! Those were your own words. You admitted you saw them and put up no fight, but let them get away, and ran so fast in the other direction you couldn't say what direction they took. You admitted that. You're a coward by your own admission.—Now I don't care what kind of a poor fish they have to look after the street lights here in Tredick, but to take care of post-office property they've got to have a man, and I'll be here later to tell them so. And I'm here to say that the army ought to know what kind of a man it's getting when they put a uniform on you.—You can do as you see fit, sergeant, but this man ought to be drummed out, I tell you."

Gillis was looking sharply at Tom Gilstar. The words of the inspector carried conviction. He seemed to know what he was talking about. Somewhere there lurked in the sergeant's mind a recollection of Tom's

queer admissions to him about being lacking in courage. He hadn't paid any attention to them at the time, but now they took a definite meaning. He was waiting to hear Tom say something for himself. Instead the big fellow was silent. The intense pride which Sergeant Gillis felt in the uniform always made him writhe at the slightest imputation against the manhood of any wearer of it.

"Speak up, for God's sake, Tom!" cried Gillis. "This man is charging you with being a coward. Tell your side of the story! You didn't run, did you? It's no disgrace if they gave you the slip in a fair scrap. Did you have a chance to use your gun? Come on, Tom, speak up!"

Tom gave his superior a look which was pitiable in its defenselessness. "I did what I could, sergeant," he uttered slowly and painfully. "I am not a coward. If I ever was, I'm not any more. All I want is to serve the flag now. I don't care what happens to *me*. I'm all done thinking of that. There were reasons — I can't explain — why I couldn't arrest those men, I couldn't, that's all. I'll be glad to leave here. I want you to send me away to-day, if you can."

"It sounds fishy, doesn't it?" jeered the inspector, grinning horribly at Gillis. "Does it sound right to you? Are you going to swallow that?"

The sergeant shook his head. He resented the manner of the detective; but at the same time he was beginning to conclude that something was radically wrong with this big fellow he had recruited. His mind went back to the day when Tom emitted a good deal of sentimental talk about being unable to kill a man. He wondered whether this was at the bottom of it — whether Tom had really tried to uphold the law as he was supposed to do — whether, in fact, he hadn't done precisely as the inspector claimed, taken to his heels at

sight of the burglars. He was frowning, dissatisfied, when there came a gentle rap at the door. "Come in!" he yelled.

The door opened, and the men saw there, hesitating on the threshold, a little silvery-haired woman. There was a look of anxiety on her face, and she looked timidly at the three men in the room.

"I — perhaps I shouldn't have come here," she said. "But I was worried about you, Tom. They told me downstairs that you were up here. I wondered why you telephoned you weren't coming home. I was afraid something was the matter. There isn't, is there?"

"Don't be afraid, Mrs. Gilstar," said Sergeant Gillis, gently, to the little woman. "You're quite welcome." At the same time he passed in front of the inspector, saying to him in an undertone, "Have a heart, now, inspector! This is the lad's mother. And the best little woman in this town!"

But the request fell on deaf ears. Cracknell was too highly incensed to consider the feelings of Mrs. Gilstar or any one else. "I can't help it!" he snarled. "I'm going to the bottom of this. How do I know that they didn't bribe Gilstar, to let them get away with it? I tell you it looks bad. Either he's a coward, or he's crooked — and I don't see why I should keep it quiet any longer, because I'm going through with it to the bottom, I tell you."

"Have a heart, I tell you!" snapped Gillis. At the same time, he strode over to the little woman and took her by the arm. "If you don't mind, I'll see you downstairs," he said. "I — this isn't any place for you just now, Mrs. Gilstar."

But the mother had heard enough to tell her that something was indeed the trouble with Tom. She didn't understand it, at all. The word "coward"

paled her soft cheeks, and she looked beseechingly at her son. And she stubbornly refused to follow the sergeant's suggestion, and he led away.

"Tom!" she cried. "They don't mean you! They don't mean that you've done anything wrong — or cowardly, Tom! I won't believe it. Tell me, Tom, dear, what's the matter. I knew there was something wrong, or you wouldn't have telephoned."

"By God, I can't stand this!" muttered the good-hearted Sergeant Gillis. "This is too raw. If you've got any heart at all, inspector —"

Gillis stopped short. Or rather, his sentence was stopped short by the crack of a revolver in the street below.

Instantly the inspector's hand went to his hip. He forgot all about Tom Gilstar. "There's something doing!" he cried, and leaped for the door. He brushed Mrs. Gilstar aside unceremoniously and rattled down the stairs.

Tom Gilstar never stirred. He stood looking at his mother. But Gillis went to the window. Instantly he emitted an excited whoop. "Say, there's something sure doing down here!" he cried. "Here, Tom, we want to get into this! Looks like a posse had brought in those fellows. Two of 'em with their hands tied behind their backs, and one fellow with a gun in his hand! Guess he fired in the air to attract attention! Come on! — No! The inspector is pointing up here! He's telling 'em to come up!"

"They've got two men!" groaned Tom Gilstar, with an agonizing glance at his mother. He felt sure he knew who the two men would be. He ran to his mother's side and seized her by the hands. "Quick, mother!" he said to her. "You don't want to be here. Here's a door on this side —"

"No, no!" the little woman resisted. "I'm going

to stay here till I find out what's the trouble, Tom. What did that man mean when he said —"

Her voice was drowned by the tramping of feet and babble of voices on the stairs. Tom Gilstar reached out and dragged her away from the door just in time. A moment afterward the big, lithe figure of Inspector Cracknell came plunging through the door, hauling a man with a bloody gash in his forehead after him. "Come on, Louis!" he cried, exultingly. "Your time is up! You don't look very pretty, Louis, but you're just as sweet to me."

Then another man was propelled through the door, by a hearty shove from behind, and he followed the first man to the other side of the room. He, too, had his hands lashed behind his back, and a tall, red-haired fellow, bare-headed, was the propeller. And then — Sherry Gilstar stepped into the room, or, rather, was forced into the room by the dozen or more eager persons behind him.

"Somebody keep that crowd out!" shouted Cracknell. "Get back, you! all of you!" But there was nobody to enforce the order. In that instant of mutual recognition, the only man in the crowd who thought of the two evil-looking prisoners at all, was the inspector.

The little old woman looked into the face of Sherry Gilstar, and with her eyes she took him to her heart. She did not faint. True, she swayed forward and back a little, and she might have crumpled had it not been for the strong arms of her bigger son, holding her tightly. Her lips said something inarticulate at first; then she uttered the simple words with which she had been unconsciously prepared to greet him at any time these years. She said:

"I knew you'd come back, Sherry!"

She did not see — she could not see — the circum-

stances under which Sheridan Gilstar had come back. It meant nothing to her at that moment. Had he been one of the manacled men, crouching sullenly in the opposite corner, it would have been the same to her at that moment. He was back!"

"Mother!" was the husky reply from Sherry. "You — here! You —" And then he threw his arms around his mother's neck, much as he had done when he was a little boy, a little bruised boy come home from playing. A moment afterwards he was whispering something in her ear, and whatever it was, a smile came to her face, and she hugged him to her breast again.

"What have you done, Sherry?" murmured Tom Gilstar to his brother, as he linked an arm under the other's arm. "This — I don't see —" he faltered.

"You'll see, Tom," replied Sherry, quickly. "I've come back to make good with you, Tom. And for other reasons."

"Here, Gilstar!" shouted Cracknell, to Tom. "You come over here and keep your eye on this pair. This is the limit! I never expected to run into a show like this!" He faced Sherry Gilstar and Hop Murray and looked them up and down in amazement.

"You two — what the devil!" he spluttered. "You're part of the gang, you two! I saw you on the train. Who the devil are you anyway? You were in Tredick last night, weren't you? How did you — what's the answer, anyway?"

Sherry glanced quickly at Hop. The tall fellow nodded slightly in approval of something they both had agreed on.

"Yes, we were part of the crowd, inspector," answered Sherry. "We were in Tredick last night. We —"

A hand seized one of the hands of the speaker, and pressed it warningly, as if to say, "Be careful, Sherry! Nobody knows. I've told nobody."

Quick as a flash Sherry turned to his brother. "Oh, don't you worry, Tom," he said, with a smile. "Don't you worry, either, mother. Nothing can happen to me, now, that I can't stand.—Inspector, this is my big brother—the biggest, bravest man that ever lived. He's so big—he's got so much real nerve, that nobody could understand how big he is, without being in the same class with him. I never gave him a square deal in his life. I picked on him when he was a kid, and I gave him the rottenest deal last night that a man could get. And I'm trying to make good with him now. Don't you see that, inspector?"

Cracknell was looking from one to the other, trying to comprehend the queer situation. He hadn't seen the impetuous greeting of Sherry with his mother, and this was the first intimation he got that the two men were brothers. Then the truth dawned on the detective. "He turned you loose in the postoffice?" he challenged.

"Yes." Sherry breathed the affirmation painfully. He glanced appealingly at his mother, fearing to see her collapse as he made the confession. She was just looking at her son, and smiling. She comprehended nothing but that he had come back. The rest was vague and meaningless to her.

"And you came back to save him from getting in bad—" began the inspector. He nodded quickly. "I get you.—But these fellows here? How did you happen —"

"We had a fight," interrupted Sherry. "Believe me, inspector, Hop and I were sick of it all. We wanted to quit this thing—we never got deep into it

— and we went back to tell those fellows so. They wouldn't have it that way. We want to go back to the army. We've both served in the army, inspector. We want to go straight. We could have got away, easy enough. But we want to be clean and decent again. And we want to get the khaki on again and show that we're white men, and Americans. We had a fight with Louis about that. And we — brought 'em along with us. That's all. I can't explain it to you any more than that."

"I'd like to cut your yellow throat, you cur!" yelled the blacksmith from the corner.

"Shut up!" roared the inspector. Then he shook his head, perplexed. "I'm blessed if I know what to do in a case like this," he said. "You admit —"

"Wait a minute!" shouted Sergeant Gillis, who had been maintaining an uneasy silence all this time. "I know this man, inspector! I mean Tom's brother! Look here, Sherry Gilstar, you never saw me before in your life, did you?"

Sherry shook his head at the recruiting officer.

"No; I know you wouldn't know me. But I remember you — the day you and this tall chap came over to our station in the Islands a few days after you got mentioned for pulling some life-saving stunt. I'd know you anywhere. Attention!"

Like an automaton, Sherry Gilstar came to rigid attention, at the command. So did Hop Murray.

Gillis laughed outright. "Old doughboys, all right!" he shouted. "You want to come back, do you?"

"Do you think we can?" said both Sherry and Hop, eagerly. "If we can get out of this scrape, do you think —"

"Just a minute," interrupted the sergeant. "What

are your reasons for wanting to get back in the uniform? It all depends on that. The army's keen on getting men with clean records — you know that."

"I know what you mean, sergeant," responded Sherry. "You think maybe we want to jump to the army to save ourselves from being sent up. We might have felt that way once, sergeant — but not now. We want to fight for the old U. S. A. That's the truth, sergeant.— Mother, I'm sorry for all the trouble and worry you've had over me.— If I can get the chance, you'd want me to enlist, wouldn't you? — Perhaps the country don't need us any more, sergeant; but God knows we both need the country; we need to do our bit. We've been a couple of poor fools; we haven't been much worse than that, honest we haven't; and now we want to quit being fools and be men." The speaker's lips trembled, as he added, with downcast eyes, after a moment, "And I suppose it's too late, now."

"Don't you believe it — not so far as I'm concerned," cried Gillis. "I don't know what the inspector is going to say or do, but I'll do my best for you, boys.— Mr. Cracknell, I believe these fellows are all right inside — look at 'em, inspector! they don't look the part, do they. Can't you put in a word for them? You can do a whole lot, if you want to. They've turned up of their own accord and brought you a couple of the men you wanted. Wouldn't you take a chance on them?"

Cracknell looked at the young fellows steadily. "If you mean, turn 'em loose, it can't be done!" he said, crisply. "You know that as well as I do, sergeant. It would mean my job — and it wouldn't do them any good, either. But there's another way. Yes, I'll do what I can. As far as I know, they're not wanted anywhere. I can hold them as witnesses for the gov-

ernment. I think they'll get suspended sentences, anyway. Maybe they'll go on probation. But I've got to hold them."

The import of the cautious words was not lost on Gillis. He knew that Cracknell was speaking guardedly, like a wise officer; but that he was inclined in the young fellows' favor.

"I'll stand by you, boys!" said Gillis, joyously. "I'll do what I can, you bet!"

"Thank you, sergeant!" said Sherry Gilstar, faintly, swaying on his feet unsteadily. "I . . ." He put his right hand to his left shoulder. "I feel — a little queer, sergeant. I — knew you wouldn't turn us down. The old flag — up there —" he saluted with an effort — I haven't been loyal to it — you can't be loyal to it, and be anything but straight and clean — but I want to fight for it — again — and I guess it will forgive a poor devil — his trespasses — as the old prayer said —"

Then, crumpling like a pricked toy balloon, Sherry Gilstar's body sank to the floor. His eyes closed, but he went unconscious with a smile of hope on his lips.

"Great Scott!" cried Gillis, leaning over him. "He's fainted! What's this! — There's a burned hole in his coat! — There's blood on his wrist and hand." He began unbuttoning the coat. He threw it back from the left shoulder.

"Good God!" cried the sergeant, straightening up and looking at Cracknell. "He's got a bullet hole in him! His shoulder is smeared with blood! He walked here — with that — and we've been keeping him standing here all the time. Talk about nerve! It must have been torturing him every second, and he never even showed it on his face. — One of those devils must have shot him in that fight they had!"

“ I wish I’d killed the squealer ! ” growled the blacksmith from his corner. “ Sure, I shot him ! ”

“ Plucky little devil ! ” murmured Sergeant Gillis. “ The kind we want, to lick the Hun ! — Here, somebody look after his mother ! She’s fainted, too ! — Lend us a hand, Tom ! — You brothers are a couple of aces ! You’re going to France together ! ”

XV

SAM GREENBERG couldn't help being flattered, of course, when Wells Hardy and H. H. Smith, two of Tredick's old-established merchants, came over to the Fifth Avenue Store that morning, and took him into confidential executive session. The young fellow, flushed with success as he was, had been secretly yearning for another recognition, as a tradesman, besides that of the public. Every tradesman feels that way. He not only wants to have a good trade, and make money; he wants his fellow merchants to acknowledge that he has a good trade, and is making money. In short, he wants recognition *in* the trade.

So, when for the first time, the two older Tredick merchants stepped into the Fifth Avenue Store, Sam Greenberg's heart fluttered with elation. He had his full share of vanity, and it was touched. His face tried not to betray his satisfaction, but he reached for the outstretched hands with real warmth.

H. H. Smith (senior of the firm of H. H. Smith & Son, grocers) looked around cautiously, after the greeting, and slyly indicated that the back of the store would be better for their purposes than the front. Sam understood. He led them to the rear, got chairs, and produced a box of good cigars. And then, a moment afterward, the young fellow flushed with joy as Mr. Smith began, after a few reflective bites at the end of his cigar:

"Greenberg, we — I mean most of us merchants — have decided that you've come to stay. I mean, we figure that you're a good business man, and a live one, and we — er — have always tried to make friends with

a newcomer, rather than antagonize him. You've got an up-to-date store here, and we've got to face real, honest competition these days, rather than hide our heads in the sand, as you might say."

"Thank you, Mr. Smith," said Sam Greenberg, appreciatively. "I don't want any bad blood, that's certain. I want to be friends with all the merchants. We all get our living the same way, and a quarrel isn't good for anybody."

"You're dead right!" put in Hardy. But Mr. Smith, an astute old fellow with white, patriarchal head, gave him a meaning glance which quelled the butcher.

"Yes, you're right," went on the grocer. "In fact, that's what we're over here for. You see, Greenberg, our lines cross, to some extent. Now, my son and I are in the grocery line, mostly, yet we keep notions and some wearing apparel, to oblige our old customers — we always have, and we're going to continue. We haven't any Board of Trade here in Tredick, Greenberg — I don't know as we need one. I think myself it's a lot better to get together in a social way and talk over things amicably, and not rouse too much public notice, either. Now, the point is this: we merchants have been talking you over, and we want your coöperation for the common good. All the merchants are agreed that I should see you about it —"

"Even Deacon Bradshaw?" queried Sam, with a faint smile.

The cautious Mr. Smith did not by word or facial expression evince the slightest show of knowledge that there might have been any contention between Mr. Greenberg and Mr. Bradshaw. He simply nodded gravely, and said, "Deacon Bradshaw is at one with us."

"Well, I'm glad of that," breathed Sam, recalling

what Prudence Perkins had said to him, the last time he saw her. "I want to be on good terms with all of you. There's room for both me and the deacon."

"Exactly,—now then, Mr. Greenberg, as I said, our lines cross. You see, the fact is, Mr. Hardy and I are a committee of two, just to see whether we couldn't get together this afternoon—maybe over here—you've got more room in the back of this store than any of the rest of us—and sort of talk things over so there won't be any misunderstanding. I think you see what I mean."

"Why, sure!" said Sam earnestly. "I'd like to have you. What time?"

"Would three o'clock do?"

"A good time, for me. How many will come?"

"Why, not everybody, of course. About five of us. The rest will be satisfied. There'll be myself and Wells, and Fred Payne, Frank Stetson, and the deacon. Would that be all right?"

"The deacon!" said Sam, softly. "Oh, sure!"

"Very well—we'll be here at three."

"Well," said Sam to himself, when the two men were gone, "That settles it! They think I've come to stay, do they? They can register a smile I've come to stay." The young fellow shoved his hands deep in his pockets, and walked around between the counters in great spirits. "I wonder what the dickens they want to talk about?" he murmured. "I guess it don't require any mind-reading to guess. They're afraid I'm going to cut prices on 'em. They've tumbled to the fact that they buy like a lot of dummies, and they're getting scared!—and the deacon is coming! Gee whizz! He may forget he wants to be friends and soak me on the bean with his cane!—Anyway, I'll show 'em a few things about entertaining."

And with that pride in doing such a thing properly,

which was characteristic of the modern city Jewish man, Sam Greenberg busied himself with putting that part of the store which was partitioned off from the front, and was cluttered with opened boxes, to rights. He made two tables into one, covered them with green denim, opened his best box of cigars, long reserved for a state occasion, and then, after some cogitation as to whether his guests ever took a "nip," decided on a safe course, and bought some unfermented grape-juice at the drug-store. He borrowed some glasses at the hotel, and ordered sandwiches and cakes prepared and sent over.

"It looks like a Y. M. C. A. festival," was Sam's own comment, grinning, "but it's probably all these guys could stand without acting scandalous."

So, it was a highly satisfied host who met the five Treddick tradesmen at the door, a little after three o'clock. All shook hands with Sam, including Deacon Bradshaw, who was obviously a chastened spirit. The deacon, once inside the store, looked around swiftly. "Humph!" he permitted himself to say. Nothing more. Just "Humph!" Whether the deacon intended it to be an agreeable humph or a disagreeable humph, was not apparent.

The eyes of the visitors opened wide when they got behind the partition. Sam was standing, watching his guests as they sat down, and wondering whether the deacon, who didn't smoke, would be offended by the cigars. Evidently the deacon was not. He reached over absently, took three of the expensive weeds, and slid them into his pocket.

The sandwiches disappeared as though not a man of the crowd had eaten dinner. Then Mr. H. H. Smith, after a long and luxurious draft of the grape-juice, sat back and stuck his thumbs in his upper waist-coast pockets and sighed. Then he began:

"Now, Mr. Greenberg, you shouldn't have put yourself out to do this for us. But as long as you did, we appreciate it. Now, I guess we can get down to brass tacks.— You know, Greenberg, this war is a bothersome thing for us merchants. We don't know what's going to happen from day to day. Now, for instance, look what took place in quiet old Tredick last night, at the postoffice —"

"Wasn't that a corker?" interrupted Sam, enthusiastically. "Regular fellers, those Gilstar boys are, I tell you! I always thought Tom was a kind of a sissy — not a sissy, exactly, but a kind of a soft chap — and now it's hard to say which is the nerviest one of the two —"

"Yes, yes," snapped Mr. Smith, hastily, with a meaning wink at Sam, as the deacon suddenly showed signs of explosion.

"I didn't come here to hear that business all gone over again," snarled the deacon. "I've heard nothing else all day so far. The fools in this village haven't got anything better to talk about. There hasn't been a stroke of honest work done since seven o'clock this morning. There's been a trail of people going back and forth to that Gilstar house, as if he was a second George Washington. Yesterday everybody'd have voted to put him behind the bars, and now —"

"But you have to admit that the boy showed he had good stuff in him, deacon," ventured Fred Payne, rashly. "You know what the good book says, deacon. There's more joy over the — one sheep,— or lamb, I forget which — in heaven, I think the words are, than over the — let's see — I think it says if ninety-nine men — I mean sheep —"

"You better read the Scriptures and go to church oftener if you're going to lecture me about it," said the deacon, savagely. "I tell you —"

"Stop it!" said H. H. Smith. "I won't stay here another minute if you're going to start fighting about that. Not another word about the Gilstars." He tapped on the table, and looked around sternly. "Still," he went on. "I must say that I'd be satisfied to call either one of them boys of mine."

And then, before the deacon could break out anew, Mr. Smith proceeded, suavely:

"Mr. Greenburg, we want to talk prices, that's what. Now, sir, you know that prices are on the jump. Lord knows where we'll land before we get through. Look at your quotations. You need new ones every day. Before your order gets in, there's a new price. Now, Mr. Greenberg, you must have considered this question; what position are you going to take on retail price on goods you bought, well, a good deal cheaper than you can buy to-day? Er —"

"I get you," said Sam quickly. "You mean, am I going to take an extra profit, or give my customer the benefit."

This was putting it with cruel directness that made the party sit up in their chairs. But they all nodded assent to the interpretation.

"The — er — fact is, Greenberg," went on Mr. Smith, "you're selling —"

"I know," nodded Sam. "Cheaper than I could buy the same goods for this minute. I know it." He took out a pencil and began to sharpen it, needlessly, but as an adjunct to thought. "I tell you, gentlemen," he said, after a pause, "I don't want to start any price-cutting game. It doesn't pay anybody. It doesn't even pay the public, because in the end we've got to make a profit, and it's got to come from them. I didn't mean to cut prices. I reserve the right to sell a few things at my own prices, as an advertisement —"

"Oh, of course. We all do that," assented Payne.

"But a cut-throat game — no. Nothing to it. But I really think, gentlemen, that we ought to sell out our stock on the profit basis we figured when we bought it. I think it's good business. We won't lose in the end by —"

"Fiddlesticks!" said Mr. Smith, warmly. "Don't be foolish, Greenberg. What are we in business for? It's money, isn't it?"

"Why, yes," replied Sam, "and the more the better, for me. You bet your life. But I'm in business for something else, too. I'm in business to stay in business. I guess you are too, aren't you?"

"I know what you mean," was the response from Smith. "You mean that you think you can build up a bigger following by not taking that extra profit that's being handed to you by circumstances. Now, that's where you're wrong, sir. That's where you don't understand the people here in Tredick. They don't appreciate such things. What do they know about prices, anyway? How do they know what we pay for our goods? The fact is," and here Mr. Smith lowered his voice and leaned over and tapped Sam on the knee confidentially, "the fact is, the public don't know much, anyway. We business men can be relied on — well, what are you smiling at? It's so, isn't it?"

"Excuse me, Mr. Smith," replied Sam, "but I was just thinking about that. Of course, you know the people here better than I do, but so far as I know, the quickest way for a business man to go broke is to start by saying that the public don't know anything. Gee, Mr. Smith, I'll admit that at times they seem to be slow getting on to a thing, but by George, when they do jump a man or a business house, they jump 'em hard."

"Then," said Mr. Smith, severely, "I understand that you intend to sell each lot on the basis of the bid

profit on that lot. That's just the same as cutting prices on us, Greenberg, and you know it. We simply can't afford —"

"Wait a minute! I didn't say what I was going to do. I said what I thought was the wise thing to do. I'm open to argument on it," interrupted Sam. He sharpened his pencil again. "I tell you what," he said, suddenly, looking at each face in turn, "there's something I've been thinking of lately. To put it flat, don't you think we'd better be satisfied with a fair margin of profit in a time like this? We know it's getting pretty hard for some folks to buy anything as it is. How much more does it cost you to do business than a year ago, Mr. Smith? Not much more, does it? Haven't you as a matter of fact lopped off a good deal of overhead because people don't demand the special services they used to? And we've always got the public beaten to it. If prices go up on us, we can always stick our prices up — pass the buck, as we say. Then why not give 'em the benefit of the doubt, and if we picked up a job of Anderson gingham at seventeen and a half, and they've gone to twenty-two — why, wasn't there always a sort of understanding between us and our customers that we'd take a fair profit and be satisfied?"

The fact was, though, that Sam Greenberg was weakening even as he argued. He did covet, in his heart, that extra profit — profiteering, it was already being called. He had a deep sympathy with the under dog — it was in his blood — but as a human being, he had a deep sentiment for himself, too, and he wanted to "clean up" in his first year of business. It meant much to him. He wanted to be able to point at the balance sheet and say to Prudence Perkins, "Well, haven't I made good, Miss Perkins?"

So when Mr. Smith adroitly pointed out that the merchants had better be forehanded, and lay by a little

surplus that they could later, if need be, pass to the needy public, Sam Greenberg found himself clutching at the notion. He knew it was a subterfuge — but it sounded well on the tongue.

“You mean, take what we can get now, while the taking is good?” he said, with a faint smile, “so that we’ll be able to carry some of these poor devils on the books, later on?”

Mr. Smith nodded; and seeing him nod, the rest of the merchants nodded. Deacon Bradshaw sat sullenly, thinking perhaps of far other things than trade, and looking coldly about him from time to time.

“Well, gentlemen,” Sam was saying, with a reluctance that he himself did not quite understand, “I see the vote was five to one, from the start. I don’t mind taking all I can get, provided it doesn’t hurt later. What’s your idea? I don’t think a written statement —”

“Oh, my goodness, no!” said the astute Smith. “Nothing like that. A gentleman’s agreement, that’s all. Nothing in writing — not from me.”

One of the girl clerks at that moment appeared at the end of the partition and beckoned to Sam Greenberg. He went aside, and after hearing the message, replied, “Tell him I’ll be out pretty soon. I’m busy now.”

For reply, a young fellow busily inserted himself between the girl clerk and the partition. “I can’t wait, Mr. Greenberg,” he announced. “I’m a reporter for the Springhaven *Gazette*. I hope you’ll pardon me for rushing in this way, but I think you’ll be interested in a little bit of news I’ve got.— I’ve just come from the Gilstar house —”

“I know nothing about the postoffice affair,” said Sam, defensively.

“Oh, it isn’t that. We’ve got another man cover-

ing that story. Bully story, too! I wish they'd given it to me. I'm supposed to do a sob-story, and I don't care for them. You're a friend of Miss Prudence Perkins, formerly of this town, aren't you?"

"Miss Perkins!" repeated Sam. "What — what about her?"

"The Cunard Liner *Hyrkania* has been torpedoed in the Irish Sea, and the cable dispatch says that a whole party of American Red Cross nurses have gone down with the ship. The *Hyrkania* was in the Red Cross service, but of course that only made it sportier for the German butchers. Miss Perkins was on the passenger list. We got the name as *Parkins*, but there's no doubt it's Miss Perkins. Mr. Greenberg, do you know if —"

Sam Greenberg had turned as white as the folded sheets of copy paper which the reporter pulled from his coat pocket. His right hand sought the lapel of the reporter's coat, and clenched it. "My God!" he whispered, "you — it must be wrong! It can't be — Miss Perkins. The name — are you sure? Was it Tredick?" Unconsciously, he was wrenching the shoulder of the reporter back and forth as he spoke.

"For the love of Mike, don't do that!" snapped the visitor. "You'll tear my clothes off. I know only what the city editor told me. I'm sore enough on this job of breaking bad news to people. Now, tell me first, please, if you know where I can get a picture of her. A tintype or a kodak picture will do, but a regular picture would be better. They told me up at her home that she never had one taken."

Sam Greenberg heard nothing of all this. He was looking out straight over the shoulder of the reporter, through the store, and out across the street at the building opposite. And he saw nothing of all that intervened. He saw only the gaunt figure of Prudence

Perkins, as he saw her last ; and he saw her face lighted by that strange new smile that had sweetness and purpose and faith and idealism in it. And she was saying, again :

"I don't know when I shall be back.—It may be I'll never come back."

"Wait for me outside," Sam whispered, hoarsely. "I'll be with you in a few minutes. Don't go away, please. Just let me finish here." The reporter nodded and withdrew. Sam turned to face five standing men, who had heard every word of the announcement, and were staring blankly at the spot where the reporter had disappeared.

"It is true? It can't be true? Not Miss Perkins! She hasn't been gone long enough. She wouldn't go over there —" They were all beginning to use their wits and voices at the same time.

"Yes, it's true. Why not?" Greenberg said, chokingly. He glanced helplessly from one man to another. His fingers were clenching and unclenching as he tried to restrain himself ; and under his eyes two black patches appeared, which set off the ghastly pallor of his cheeks. He swung his right arm around in an inclusive semi-circle and went on falteringly :

"This is it! Men, do you see? Do you see that while we've been sitting here trying to figure out new ways of skinning the public, Miss Perkins has — died for us? That's what it is — for us — for everybody — she's given everything! My God, men, don't you see that? She said when she went away from here — you heard her say at the meeting that day — that she could give herself — if she hadn't any son to give. And we — good God! — what have we given? Not a thing. We haven't had any country. We haven't had anything we cared enough about to give anything.

And she's gone! The biggest woman that ever lived! She's gone."

The young fellow threw himself into a chair and putting his head on his arms, which sprawled out before him on the table, shook with sobs.

"Oh, don't do that!" Fred Payne was saying to Sam, patting him on the shoulder, and trying to choke back the tears that welled into his own eyes. "Don't do that, Greenberg. It may not be—you can't trust —"

Sam looked up, showing a haggard face. "You don't know what it means to me," he said, not seeming to address the five men, as speaking to himself. "It was coming to me—because I didn't—I didn't care for anybody but myself. I forgot I was an American. When they talked about patriotism to me, I gave them the laugh. I said it was the dollars people were thinking about. I said nobody gave anything for nothing. I said that. I forgot—I was an American. Men, I was born in New York. But my father and mother came from Kiev. They came here—they came here, with something behind them—they didn't talk about. That something—it used to sit at the table with us—I was a little chap, but I felt it too—it was what they had come away from in Russia. Sometimes my father would be almost happy—and mother would laugh too—and then a queer look would come on father's face—and he'd wince as if somebody had hit him in the face with a whip—and he'd pull my mother up to him and say, 'Thank God we're here in America.' And I've been forgetting all that. Because I was born in New York—and all us kids didn't know what it meant to be free—because we didn't know anything else.—That's what she was trying to tell me. I didn't understand. But she's made me

understand. She wanted to make everybody understand.—The best friend I ever had — she never asked me who I was, or where I came from — she thought I was on the level — and she said, ‘I’ll give you a chance to go into business right —’ ”

“I knew it! I knew she set you up in business here!” flashed out Deacon Bradshaw. But, strangely enough, he didn’t seem to be angry about it, now. He merely couldn’t keep back the revelation as it came to him.

“Yes, she did! What difference does it make now? I don’t care who knows it! I want everybody to know it. I want to tell everybody what she did for me. Nobody knew anything about her. She had the biggest heart — she cared more for all of you — than you knew anything about. You wouldn’t believe her when she said — what she said — and she had to — my God, I can’t stand it!”

The young fellow jumped up, kicked the chair out behind him and cried:

“I don’t know what you’re going to do. But I know what I’m going to do! This stuff is all off, men. No agreements — nothing from me. So far as I’m concerned the party is over. If this store can’t run without me it can’t run. Do you think I can sit around and dicker about the price of sheeting with — her lying — over there?”

“What are you going to do?” asked the guests.

“Do? I’m going to do the only thing I can do. I’m going to enlist.”

“Enlist!” Deacon Bradshaw’s heavy eyes showed a quick glint of interest. “Why, you’ll —”

“Take it! Take it! If it’ll do you any good!” snapped Greenberg. “If you’ve wanted to see this store closed, I guess you’ll get your hope. A business — well, a business is a business, and I’m a Jew, and I

let go hard. Believe me, I let go hard, men. But it's what *she* wants, not what I want. You can understand that? All right. But I tell you, it don't make any difference what I want, now. She says, 'Fight!' That's good enough for me. She doesn't want me to fight for *her*. She's too big for that. She wants me to fight for the only things that make anything worth living for — and for the country that's let us all live and breathe and be men. Well, I'm a man! I enlist this afternoon."

Greenberg was standing now at the door. He pointed a finger at the astonished crowd, and a clear smile came on his heavy lips. "Lend me a soap-box and a lantern to-night, Mr. Smith," he said, gayly, "because I'm going to make a speech. I'm going to pass out with a loud noise, believe me, and I'm going to tell a lot of things I didn't know until a few minutes ago.— This is a war, men! I just found it out. So long!"

XVI

A GREAT, magnificent, invisible Thing was striding the quiet streets of Tredick, now. But it was not like that Thing before which Tredick had cowered, in days past. This was no longer Fear that walked abroad. Its name was Service.

The old, splendid spirit had returned to Tredick, and had found every heart a receptive heart, and everybody an eager instrument. They saw it now — the meaning of that Khaki — the Khaki which had brought Tom Gilstar to the last degree of self-sacrifice without a whimper; the khaki which had sent Sherry Gilstar and Hop Murray back to the village craving some sharp experience that would leave them with clean saluting hands; the khaki which Prudence Perkins had worn in her soul when she threw everything aside to go forward and give all that lay in her power to give.

Khaki and Service — they were the same, then! One symbolized the other! It was not the cloth, but the meaning that rested, pure and strong, behind that woven symbol.

One after another these things had passed before the eyes of Tredick; so swiftly that Tredick had to catch its breath. Tom, Sherry, Prudence — and now Sam Greenberg! Tredick was awakening at last! You could see it in every eye, in every flushed and expectant and inquiring face. Something old-fashioned and clear began to glow; something fine and articulate came into speech.

Not that the meaning of Service was instantly clear:

no. Not that Tredick immediately asked, waking from a long sleep. "How can I serve?" No; — one does not awaken from a long sleep that way. But once aroused, this keen sense of *belonging*, of partnership and stewardship in something, worked like a summer leaven. And when Tredick felt that it was really coming back to the American Union, it was really coming back to something more than that; it was coming back to the World. To a World where men and women are willing to suffer and to die for the right to be free.

A tall, angular woman, sharp of features and downright of speech, had gone away from Tredick, and she was not coming back to Tredick any more. Fathoms deep she lay, now, with other men and women who had seen some clear truth, and followed it, followed it where it leads into the ambush of the Hun, that Hun to whom Truth, and Love, Infancy, Womanhood, are but targets for his cruelly exulting steel and blast.

They stood on street corners, and in front of the postoffice, and by the railroad station, and on the steps of the Congregational Church, and talked falteringly, hesitatingly, in low-pitched voices, of this woman. Tom Gilstar was packing a few most-needed things, ready to go to camp, and his brother Sherry lay with a torn shoulder in the sunny, fresh bedroom to which he had come back to sleep, and Tredick knew that these boys had found the way to serve; but Tredick folks were not thinking of them now. Their thoughts were of a woman; an old woman, if you please, a painfully thin, awkward, sharp-tongued woman, of whom they had always stood a good deal in awe, thinking that she had a superior contempt for her own kind. And now they strove to recall everything that she had said — going far back — years back — as we do ever when PAID has been stamped upon the life

account of our neighbor, and we must know how he or she faced the last adventure.

"I remember how she looked that day," said somebody, slowly. "You remember, it was the big mass meeting. She was talking right out to Professor Wenham. You remember, don't you? — she said, 'I've got nothing but myself,—with nothing to look forward to except making money. But, thank God, I've got something to give!'"

"She had a queer look in her eye when she said that, sure."

"It's funny a woman with all that money would take any chances —"

"It shows she must have been thinking of these things for a long time."

"If that damn Wenham should come along now, I'd bust him in the jaw —"

"No; don't talk that way. *She* wouldn't want any grudges —"

"They say she was disappointed a good many years ago, in a love affair. My father says he knew who the fellow was. She was mighty attractive then, and the brightest girl in town."

"Well, cut out that talk. That's nothing to be gabbling about now. The Huns have murdered her, that's what. And we never knew —"

"— What a fine woman she was. That's right. I know of a poor family that when they got hard up always —"

"Is it true she started this young Jew in business?"

"Yes; and he's all broke up. He's enlisted."

So they talked on the street corners; and it must be said that most of it was idle talk; and it must be said that it ran headlong to the gruesome, and to gossip, and to mean, practical matters, and to self. And yet

there was something more than all this. It took the form of a question. "Why?"

Why had Prudence Perkins done this thing?

And little by little Tredick realized the answer. That, out of her bitter, torn, hurt years in Tredick, she had found the emptiness of money and of self-seeking, and of worldly wisdom and shrewdness, and the fat contentment which had been in danger of riding this Tredick and every American Tredick to a sleek, squalid, dastardly end. She had been the first one in Tredick to perceive that happiness comes only through self-sacrifice and service; that was all.

She had seen promise in Sherry Gilstar because he had worn the khaki of service; and she never lost faith in him. She had seen, deeply hidden, something of this spirit in Sam Greenberg — and he had justified her discernment. She had despised the deacon and Wenham, and the rest of them, because they prattled of service on Sunday, and denied it on the following six days. And when she saw that the way of service was the way of humanity — of human rights — and when she saw that this clumsy, struggling, muddled, well-meaning United States of hers must serve by suffering and dying and toiling against the might of a barbarian horde without honor, without mercy, without soul — she seized her bit of khaki and went forth.

And when these simple truths came to Tredick, Tredick also asked, "How can I serve?"

That night, Tredick heard.

Outside the postoffice, on the curbing, was a wooden box. Beside the box was a telephone pole, from which hung a gasoline lamp which ordinarily flickered and hissed at the little fruit store of Nick Papas, a twenty-two-year-old Greek, on the Odd-Fellows-Hall corner. On the box stood a man, just short of thirty. He wore

a dark, perfectly tailored suit, with other accessories which cried the city-bred man who loves to be well dressed. In his right hand was a tightly clutched black derby; in the other hand he held a small American flag. It was Sam Greenberg.

It was good to look at this man's face. He was not of the race of the crowd that faced him — a crowd which bowed back clear under the trees of the Common opposite, and was standing with bared heads while a cornetist played the national anthem. It was good, I say, to look at this young fellow's face. It was a face which might have displayed, beneath a crown of coarse black hair, merely cleverness and good-natured sophistication. It was a face which had expressed, in time gone, just those things, and nothing more. But now, it was different.

The glow from the gasoline lamp showed up every line — and made the shadows under the eyes like black patches of court-plaster. It brought into relief a determined jaw — and a jaw that had passion and suffering in its poise. You could not see the eyes, except at rare flashing intervals — but when you did see them, there was something extraordinary in them — like a new-found and powerful love and determination. It was the love of material things suddenly converted to something else.

The last note of the cornet died away, and two right hands dropped from the forehead to the side with a sharp slap. These hands were those of Gillis and Kirkpatrick, the two recruiting officers, who stood directly behind the man on the box.

The hand that held the flag wavered a little as it was raised above Greenberg's head, and the first words cracked out harshly and unevenly. But there was a ring in them that made them not merely heard, but felt.

"My friends, I want to thank you for the way you've turned out. I wondered if those handbills would do the business. Well, they have. I suppose many of you, when you read the bills, just grinned and said, 'Greenberg is doing some advertising.' Well, you were right. I was doing some advertising; and the biggest I ever did. But it wasn't for Greenberg, and it wasn't for the Fifth Avenue Store. To-morrow, there won't be any Fifth Avenue Store. Gee! that hurts, to say it—but here goes. I've enlisted in the army.

"But I didn't get you here just to tell you that! Wait a minute before you begin to throw anything! I wanted to get a crowd here that I could tell why I enlisted, and I wanted to tell why because I thought I'd like some fellows to go with me over there—and if you'll go easy on a poor devil that never spoke off a soap-box before, I won't take but a few minutes of your time.

"Fellows, I didn't know until this afternoon that there was a war. Sure, I've been reading the newspapers! But it sounded a long way off, and I didn't see any reason why I couldn't go right on ringing up sales on the cash register, and let George do the scrap-ping, if he liked it so much. Once or twice I've got letters from home that said that some of the kids I used to play with, around the New York Central elevated tracks at a Hundred-and-sixteenth street, had joined the army or navy. What did I say? I said, 'The poor boobs have gone off their nuts. Or else they've done something, and they want to beat it out of town.' I didn't get the idea that this war had anything to do with me, at all. Maybe you've felt that way, a little, some of you.

"This afternoon—I found out—that I had a little share—in this war. I can't tell you—about

her—you’ve all probably known her longer than I have—but—well, she’s over there. You all know what Miss Perkins did for me. She gave me a chance to make good—and nobody else ever thought it was worth while to do that. I can’t talk about that. I—it’s something else I want to say. But—damn their German souls, they never gave her a chance! Get me, fellows! They never gave her—or any of those women who were going over there to nurse the sick and wounded—never gave ’em a chance!

“I tell you the truth, before this afternoon if you’d come to me and said that the Huns were murdering women and children, and that sort of thing, I’d have probably said it was another one of those newspaper stories. Why? Because I didn’t want to believe it, that’s why! It would have bothered me to think it was true, so I said it probably wasn’t. And the reason why I didn’t want to believe it was because I wanted to go on doing business at the good old stand, and I wanted to play safe behind my doors, and I didn’t want to see this country fight because it would have meant that I might have to fight.

“Well, I see a lot of things now! But *she* had to show ’em to me by going over there, and dying over there. I can see now that we—I mean fellers like me—have been taking our living under false pretenses. We were getting our money, and our food and our protection here in this country of ours, and when it came to paying for it, or showing any gratitude for it, we wanted to make a twenty per cent. composition—and pay that in wooden money. It wasn’t because we didn’t know that if Germany wins this war, we’ll be working for the Kaiser. It was just that we wanted to sit tight and let somebody else go out and die for us! Well, she went out and died for us. Is that good enough? Is that—I can’t say any

more, fellows — something gets me in the side, here — I had a long spiel I was going to make — but I can't do it! I just want to say that if you've got a pal, a good pal, he's worth going to the last ditch for; if you've got a country that's worth living in, it's worth fighting and dying for; if you're an American, whether you were born here or because the door was open and you walked in — you've got to put your hand on the table now! We're all called — and we've got to show.

“Who'll go with me? Who'll put on the uniform and serve under this flag? I give you my word, I never fired a revolver in my life! But I'm going to learn now! and believe me, I'm going to get a few of those Huns if I can! Come on, fellows — you young fellows — step up where we can see you! What about it? Fellows, this is the happiest minute of my life. I can't tell you how it feels — but you'll know. It's doing something without figuring percentage! It's going somewhere on a job for the thing that looks biggest to you! Who'll come with me? — There's Joe Capodilupo! Joe, come on!”

The Italian cobbler stepped out of the front line of the crowd with a smile that showed his teeth. “Sure!” he replied. “I'll go, Mr. Greenberg!”

“Number one!” shouted Sam, waving the flag frantically. “Say, fellows, don't you get the idea? Oh, if there was only somebody with an education, to tell you about these things! I've got it all inside, here, but I don't know how to say it. It's being on the level with yourself, and the old flag! It's doing your bit for the kids and the women, and the folks that have to live after we've kicked out! It's being of use — of service to something that don't pay dividends in money, but in something that makes a man of you! It's —”

Greenberg stopped suddenly, his face ashen; and as

he tried to step down from the box, he reeled. Sergeant Gillis caught him by the arms.

"I can't go on; I feel dizzy and faint, sergeant!" breathed Sam. "But I've got them going! They're interested. You go to it now."—Then he gasped, with a pitiful little spasm of diffidence, "I didn't make a fool of myself, did I, sergeant?"

"Make a fool of yourself? Not on your life! You're the best little recruiter in the army, Greenberg!"

Sergeant Gillis leaped up on the box, and began to shout. He saw the mood of the crowd, and knew that his time for business had come. His metallic voice barked out in the night air.

"Now is the time!" he cried. "You've seen what's happened. We've got Tom Gilstar—look at him, over there! The biggest, bravest chap you ever saw in your life—and you never suspected it, did you? We've got another boy that will get the Hun, believe me—up at the Gilstar house—as soon as he gets well. We've got Greenberg, who is going to let everything slide and take a chance with the colors. That's patriotism, I tell you, men! Girls, don't let yourself be found in company with a man who shows yellow, now!—Let's make a regular meeting of it, now we're here. Anybody want to speak? You? You? Climb up here and tell how you feel about it!"

An egg-shaped man, pale as death, elbowed his way through the crowd. "Yes; I've got something to say if they'll listen to me!" he said, in a trembling voice. It was Prof. George Watling Wenham, of the Academy.

"Right up on the box!" barked Sergeant Gillis, grasping the corpulent man by an elbow and shoulder, and giving him a boost.

But when the crowd saw who was facing them, there was a rebellious murmur. Somebody yelled, "Get

down, Wenham! You've done enough! Go home and hide your head! You insulted Miss Perkins!"

The big man hesitated a moment. "I want to make a public apology," he said, thickly.

"Let him talk! Give him a show! Let's hear what he has to say! None of that coward stuff!" There were jeers and catcalls, and more cries of "Give him a show! Fair play! Let's hear what he has to say!"

"I've been wrong—" began the professor, faintly.

"Louder! Can't hear you!"

"I was wrong!" repeated Wenham, his voice slipping into a scream. "I want to make a public apology. I meant to do what was right—you can't doubt that I was honest about it! Friends, you can't doubt that! I wanted peace. But I don't want peace any more. At least I don't want it at the price I was willing to pay! There is something bigger than peace—I see that now—we are all beginning to see it—because the noblest woman in Tredick made us see it! There is something bigger than peace, and that is self-sacrifice, which is service! Friends, this is a terrible moment for me. You can't realize how I feel. Oh, if that wonderful woman were only here to grant me forgiveness! What can I do? I must do something—I must be of help—"

"I'll tell you what you can do!" rang out the voice of Harold Stenner, cashier of the bank. "I'll tell you what you can all do—you who can't fight. You can buy Liberty bonds. I'm right here to take subscriptions. Give me your names and the amount you can take, and I'll collect later."

"But I want to *give* something," rejoined Wenham. "I've got a little money laid away. I want to give it—not lend it."

"Well, just as you please," said Stenner. "I'll take it for the Red Cross, if you say. But don't anybody

get the idea that you're not serving your country when you lend your money to it! Uncle Sam doesn't want charity. He wants working capital — and he's ready and willing and able to pay interest on it!"

Sergeant Gillis gently removed the principal of the academy from the rostrum. "Any one who wants to talk Liberty Loan can see Mr. Wenham!" he cried. "Just now we want recruits! We want you fellows who can fight."

"I'll enlist!" cried Fred Payne, stepping forward. "Damned if I'll have it said that I wasn't willing to serve the country!"

He meant it too, this man of forty-two or thereabouts, stoop-shouldered and wind-bleached. "Put me down for a suit of khaki, sergeant. I guess Ma can look out for herself till I get back."

"God bless your soul," cried Gillis, smiling. "I wish we could take you, Mr — er — What's your name — but I'm afraid we can't. You're a little bit —"

"Am I? Am I?" shrilled Payne, belligerently. "Too old, am I? I'll wrastle any of this young fry, two falls out of three. Too old, am I? Don't you believe it."

Out in the middle of the crowd Wells Hardy and his indispensable son Herbert had been standing, or rather, swaying with the mass. Suddenly young Hardy grasped his father's arm. "I've got to enlist, dad," he whispered. "I'm going up now. You can get along some way at the store —"

The tears came into Wells Hardy's eyes. "I wouldn't say a word to stop you, Herbie," he murmured. "I guess we haven't realized how serious it is. If you really want to go — well, I'm proud of you. Since Tom enlisted, and Sherry Gilstar came back, and Prudence — has gone — it seems different."

But before Herbert Hardy reached the sergeant, an elderly man and his strapping son were there at the soapbox. "Mr. Officer," said the father, "my son Johnnie wants to go. He'll make a good soldier for you. He's put up three cords of four-foot wood every day the last week. Feel of his muscle."

"I don't need to feel of his muscle," laughed Gillis. "He's a corker."

"When my wife was sick, and I was down with rheumatism, five years ago, Miss Perkins came down to our place, 'bout five miles from here, to see us. She had a mortgage on us, and when I saw her driving into the yard, I shut the door of ma's room quick, so she couldn't hear what was said. We hadn't even paid the interest for two years. Miss Perkins says, 'George, you've had about enough trouble, I guess. Here's that mortgage. It won't bother you any more.' And she lifted up the cover of the chunk-stove and threw it in.—Johnnie, don't you come back here without killing a dozen of those murderers!"

It was an innocent speech and anti-climax that would have been grotesquely funny at any other time. But those who heard the father of Johnnie, received the words in grim, approving silence.

Sam Greenberg was standing now silently at the side of Kirkpatrick. He had done all he could; and he had the feeling, though he watched the progress of the meeting he had set in motion, in a sort of daze, that altogether he had done well. He observed that the crowd was beginning to split up into attentive groups; the surest sign that a crowd is applying its own mind to the mind of the speakers. There was no loud, turbulent emotion, no jostling, and nobody even interrupted any more. Over all there was evident a fine sense of thoughtful restraint. They were asking,

"What can we do to serve?" They were entering the khaki, every one of them, even those who would never wear it except in the spirit.

"The best job I ever put over," Sam was saying to himself. "I don't know where I'm going, but I'm certainly on my way — and it feels good so far," he added, whimsically. And then, somebody touched him on the arm. He turned and looked into the face of Deacon Bradshaw.

The deacon's eyes sought those of his young rival with troubled timidity, and anxiety. Those heavy gray eyebrows, which gave Charles Bradshaw his scowling appearance, seemed lower than ever. His eyelids looked inflamed, in that glaring light. He said, hoarsely, "Can you come with me a minute, Greenberg?"

"Sure!" replied Sam, curiously. Then he be-thought himself that he might no longer be his own master in such matters. He touched Kirkpatrick lightly. "Is it all right if I go?" he asked.

"Why, of course." Kirkpatrick held out his hand. "Bully for you, Sam!" he said. "You'll be 'round in the morning, won't you? You've started the ball rolling. I'll tell the captain about it. Those little things count."

"You don't mind coming over to — my store?" asked Charles Bradshaw, when they gained the free part of the Main street.

"No, of course not." Greenberg looked at his companion again, trying to read the puzzle. The old man was walking swiftly with bowed head. His cane ferrule rang on the bricks with each pace. They came to the store. Fumblingly the deacon unlocked the door, and they edged back among the tables and counters, their way lighted only from the feeble glow from outside, till they reached the far end. There the

deacon turned on a single incandescent lamp over his desk, and motioned to a chair.

First, the old man reached in a pigeon-hole of the desk and took out three cigars. He passed them over solemnly. "I'm sorry I took them this afternoon," he said, in a low voice. "I don't smoke, and I just took them for greed. I'm afraid I've been — that way — too much. I'd feel better if you take 'em back."

Sam Greenberg laughed for the first time in years, it seemed to him. He waved his hand and replied, "Oh, couldn't think of it! Why, you're as welcome as the flowers in May, deacon."

"I'd rather you'd take 'em," insisted the deacon, with such sober entreaty that Greenberg put them in his pocket. He stared with amazement at the old man, who creaked back in the swivel chair, removed a big linen handkerchief from his pocket, folded it the long way, and placed it over his eyes, with a mournful sigh.

"You're not feeling well, deacon!" cried Sam. "Hadn't I better —"

"No, I feel well enough. Except — a little dazed and queer." Then he sat bolt upright and pecked out these words:

"Do you believe she — Prudence — is — gone?"

There was a moment of silence before Sam choked out, "Yes. God, I'd give everything to — not to believe it. But — it's no use."

"I'm an old fool," said the deacon, sharply, as though addressing himself, "just as I was a young fool. You've enlisted in the army, Greenberg, nothing I can say would make you feel any better or worse — but I envy you. I'm an old man, my boy — a poor stubborn willful old man, who can't even enlist. There are days coming — *she was right — she was always right* — that will try our souls — and nothing

for a willful old man but to plod his way to the grave here in Tredick, while the youth — the young blood — are living to the full. Well, I suppose I've earned just that. I suppose I have. It's a bitter draught, though."

"Upon my word, deacon," exclaimed Sam, beginning to be afraid he was in parley with a lunatic, "I don't get what you mean at all."

"No, perhaps not," went on Charles Bradshaw, in that even, placid manner with which old age clothes the deepest emotions. He eyed his young companion keenly, and fell to folding and refolding the big handkerchief. Then he went on, still though mostly to himself:

"She was always the brave soul. She was a real woman, and yet bigger than most women. There was something too fine about her that made people afraid of her, and yet they wanted to love *her*. Look at them now. Out in the street there! They are thinking about her.— Yes, she was the kind that knows even how to die, to do it the noblest way."

"You mean Miss Perkins," said Sam, heavily, and perplexed to hear the deacon talking about her in this way.

"I mean *her*," said Charles Bradshaw, with finality. "You're going away, young man. Anyway, I don't care if you do tell. It won't make any difference now. Yes — I ought to tell, and I must tell some one."

"If there was anything harsh and unlovely about that wonderful woman, I was the cause. I did her a great wrong, Greenberg. She — cared for me. I — well, I must have loved her, or it wouldn't have left this scar. But I was greedy. I wanted money. And she came of poor folks. I wanted her, but I wanted money. And so I went where money was."

"I broke my word to her. Yes. I did that. She

closed her eyes tight for a minute, that night I — I told her, and she put her hands over her breast — like this — and when she spoke to me, it wasn't the same voice any more. And she laughed — not a pleasant laugh, like her old school-girl laugh.

“‘Money!’ she said to me. ‘Yes, perhaps that’s the greatest thing in the world, Charles. I guess it must be, or — this wouldn’t happen. We’ll run a race for money, to see who gets the most first. We’ll both marry money — only I won’t be bothered with a husband. I’ll marry the dollars outright.’

“She always beat me in business, Greenberg. She had more brains than I ever had. She had more brains than all of us put together. And she had something else. She — Phœbe told me she had a doll, a big doll up in her room, that she used to dress new every year. God above us — I did that to her! *That* was why she had no son to give to her country —”

“We’d better go out with the crowd!” choked Sam Greenberg, jumping to his feet, suddenly.

“Wait a minute. I won’t say any more. I’m a willful old man,—and this is a judgment on me. She’s gone, gone! There was nobody — nobody — wait a minute, I’ll come to the point. She has shown me the way to serve, Greenberg — as she showed you. Let me do what I can. I’ll buy bonds — thousands of bonds — anything money can do. I’ll do it for the country; I don’t dare to say I’ll do it for her. But your store, the Fifth Avenue Store — it was hers and yours, you say. I’ll run it for you, while you’re away. I’ll run it without a cent of pay — and I’m honest — they’ll tell you that — if I am a fool. I’ll close this store and run that store of yours — and I’ll make it pay you handsomely, Greenberg — because I ought to — and she must have liked you a little —”

“You don’t mean it!” shouted Greenberg. “You

don't mean you'll keep our store going till maybe I come back —"

"Every penny of profit shall be hers and yours," was the answer. "If you'll let me — will you? — I'm an old man and willful, but my word is good, and I'll give bond —"

"Wait! I can't think of all these things at once, Mr. Bradshaw," said Sam. "Look at the crowd out there. They're cheering something or somebody. What the devil is a store anyway? Let's get out there and give a bunch of cheers for the U. S. A. That's the only thing that's worth while, now."

XVII

WHEN Sherry Gilstar opened his eyes, he felt that he must have slept a long, long while. There was the faint, recollective odor of clean linen; and the sheets between which he lay felt soft-ironed — just slightly crisp, and refreshing. He was looking up at the ceiling overhead.

The ceiling was just as it looked when he slept in this bed years before. It was dull white, but, perhaps owing to the thinness of the plastering, the laths showed through in long gray lines. In a bee-line from his eyes was a hook. He had never known what that hook was for; he recalled wondering what it was for, as a boy, and he marveled that he had never asked and found out. Then he remembered — it must have been when he was a little fellow — seeing a spider, one morning, letting himself down plump toward the childish nose, from that hook; and he remembered that he had screamed; and mother came. . . .

As he lay staring at the familiar hook, and thinking of the predatory spider, a breeze fanned his hot forehead, coming through the screen in the window at the right. No breeze had ever seemed so good, so pure. It was not laden with any perfume of flowers; it was just one of those keen breaths of ozone from the mountains over yonder — a breath of late Spring, full of returning life.

Something moved, Sherry thought, at his right hand; but he felt too luxuriously tired and weak to turn his head, at first. He thought he perceived another human breathing than his own, too; yet he felt

blissfully conscious of phantasies, and let it go at that, much as very sick men ignore the footsteps of the Stranger.

But when the young fellow did dreamily turn his head toward the right, two deep tender eyes were looking into his — eyes that were wistful and a little afraid, as those of a young mother who stands over the little crib, fearful lest the child awaken — fearful lest it should not awaken.

“I didn’t disturb you, did I, Sherry?” said Alice Bradshaw in a whisper. “I have been as quiet as a mouse. Your mother said I might sit here till you woke up.”

He had enough fever so that, before his eyes, the beautiful face receded and came close, and receded again, as he watched. First her eyes were very close to his, and then they went away off, and slowly came back again. Then, as he threw off this whimsy of temperature, he saw that she was trying very hard to smile, and not succeeding very well. He had never found it hard to smile, himself; and he did not now.

“I didn’t expect to see you here, Alice.”

She did smile then, because she wanted to seem as cheerful as possible, to make him cheerful. “Oh, Sherry,” she said, “you should see your friend Mr. Murray, with an apron tied around his waist, downstairs helping your mother with the dishes! It’s so funny!”

Sherry laughed quietly at that; not because he thought it very funny, but because he was expected to enjoy it. “Hop will make a good servant-girl,” he snickered.

She took the hand that rested on the edge of the bed. His hand was hot, and hers seemed cold to him. “I’ve been watching you as you lay there asleep, Sherry,” she said, slowly. “I don’t know that I ever

noticed anybody asleep before, except very little children. I wonder if we all look that way — I mean very innocent and helpless, like children.”

“I guess I couldn’t have looked very innocent,” he replied, with a throbbing recollection of the past few days.

“Oh, Sherry!” she cried, clutching his hand more tightly. “I’ve such good news for you! I wanted to be first to tell you. Mr. Cracknell was here while you’ve been asleep. He’s coming back here later. He says it can be fixed now, so that you won’t even need to appear in court. Those men are going to plead guilty. He says if Mr. Murray will go, you needn’t. You can make a — I forget what it is — some sort of paper telling about it. And he said to your mother, ‘I wouldn’t stand in the way of that plucky boy of yours for anything, Mrs. Gilstar. I wish I could enlist along with him.’ And Sergeant Gillis says he wants to come up to see you as soon as you’re able.”

The young fellow smiled faintly; but the news didn’t stir him very much. Alice was a little disappointed at his easy silence.

“And Sam Greenberg, who was in partnership with your aunt, has enlisted! Just think of that, Sherry!”

“Bully for him!” was the reply.

But still Sherry seemed to have little interest. He turned his head and stared at the ceiling again. The girl’s lip trembled, and she turned her own head and rested it on her arm, which lay along the back of the chair. She was silent a while. Then she faltered, “Sherry, you’re not — very sick — are you?”

He turned again and looked at her. “Alice,” he replied, “I’m not very sick, if you mean my shoulder. But I’m sick somewhere in my head. I’ve been lying here twisting my brain till it’s in knots, I guess. I’m glad — about what Cracknell says, But I wouldn’t

have cared much, either way. I can't bear the idea now of people doing things for me. I — I've got to do something for other people — or I don't want to go on living. In fact, Alice, if they let me go back to the army, I'm hoping — that I'll have a chance — to leave a medal or something — not that *I* want any medal — but for mother, and the others. I want 'em — I suppose it's selfish — but I want 'em to say, after the casualty lists come in, 'Well, Gilstar did something decent after all. He wasn't a complete —'

"You don't know what you're saying, Sherry," interrupted the girl. "You — you're not going to France to die, Sherry. You're going over there to *live*. Tom is going over there to *live*. Sam is going over there to *live*. Because we haven't any of us been living — not any of us, even those who are called the best of us. You don't live unless you live — a little — or a good deal — for others. Oh, I've just come to see that! But it's so. That's why I'm going to France —"

"You!" Sherry Gilstar was up on one elbow. "No! Not you!"

"Yes. I am going. I want to *live*. I'm going into the Red Cross, as — as dear Prudence did. And won't that be splendid, Sherry — you and I — both in France — the same errand — to do something for others — we won't see each other, maybe — but we'll know! Oh, Sherry, I'm going to wait till you are well and strong, and able to go. Then I'm going. We'll both come back — I know that — I know it because — well, we've just got acquainted with ourselves and each other, and God wouldn't — let it end there. You've never been nice to me, Sherry — you know what I mean; you've never made much love to me; and I like you all the better for it — but I have always known what you thought and what I thought, Sherry

—and after we've done something for other people, we'll come back and be very happy —”

“You don't mean to say that — after all this — you would care for me, and — all, if I made a man of myself!” He was staring into her eyes with avid, feverish, doubting eyes.

“After all this! I don't know as all *this* was very much — or bad — or anything. But we mustn't talk about it now, anyway. First, we are Americans, Sherry. That must come first. We are going to France, because we are needed. We must help. We must suffer, and be patient, and useful. And we'll be very happy doing that, won't we? This must all come first, though. You will fight, and I will nurse —”

“But your father won't let you!”

“My father is my father, Sherry. The United States is my country. And father's country. And if father can't see or hear, I can.— You don't know, dear Sherry, what's been going on here since you came home, and were brought to this room. Tredick isn't Tredick any more. Oh, it's wonderful! They're not talking about anything but the war — and not the war news, or the war gossip, but about what *we* are going to do to help. Think of it, Sherry, fourteen young fellows enlisted this morning! They were the ones who offered their services last night. At Sam's mass meeting, you know. I heard that Mr. Stenner got subscriptions for more than \$28,000 last night, too — just think of all that, in one night, in Tredick.— So you see, Sherry, *we* must go. You and I. We are going to *live*.”

He reached for one of her hands, and clasped it eagerly between both his. “I see what you mean, Alice!” he cried. “It hasn't been clear to me, at all. I knew I wanted to get back in the khaki, and do something decent and clean; but I hadn't thought of

it that way. Yes; they do need us — they need me — don't they? Say that again, Alice! I can't hear that too many times! I've wanted to be needed — I guess that must have been it all these years, when I wanted something, and didn't know what it was. I've wanted to be of service. And now I can.—I wonder if Cracknell is right? I mustn't slip now. I mustn't lose this chance! — And you're going to France! Oh, Alice, if I get shot, I'll ask them to slip me into your hospital. You wouldn't have to do anything — band-ages or that stuff — all I'd have to do would be to look at you —”

“Oh, please! You're making fun of me, now, Sherry!”

“No, not by a long shot. I mean it.—I —” The young fellow turned so quickly that he wrenched the wounded shoulder, and it brought a gasp from him, and sent the blood out of his cheeks. “Ugh! That hurt!” He flopped down and lay pressing her hand gently for a while. Then without lifting his head, and without opening his eyes, he said softly:

“Alice — my dearest little girl — I feel almost well again. That — you said about the country coming first in our hearts — that's right — I'm with you there. God bless the old flag, and everything it stands for — and all the people who love it, Alice — forever and ever. I — I won't say anything more now — about you and me. I — I've always loved you, Alice — and because I thought I could never have you — I was weak enough to be a quitter and a sneak. I have always loved you — but it must have been I didn't love you the right way — or something — because now I see that even love for a dear woman won't make a man small, but big — and it makes me big now — and I can keep it in my heart — and fight for others — in France. I'm pretty weak, I guess. I had no idea it

made a fellow so tired to talk. It never did before, Lord knows. But I'll be on my feet pretty soon, and I'll make a bee-line for the recruiting office.— I said I wouldn't talk about you and me — but — would it be all right — if you should tell me now that when it's all over, and we've done our bit — that you'll still care for me, and let me fight for you, and be my sweetheart?"

"I shall always care for you; and when you are through fighting for Liberty and helpless women and children, and our country — I want you to be ready to fight for me — my own Sherry!"

A boyish smile came on his face as he lay with closed eyes. "Forever and ever," he said softly. "And — don't they usually, when men are sick and weak, and can't reach very far — don't dear girls sometimes put their faces somewhere near —"

"They do, Sherry!" she cried. "At least, this one does!" And she leaned over, and pressed her face against his — and he felt warm tears running down between their cheeks. And he did not know whether they came from her eyes or his own.

They are much the same, perhaps — these good-bys; and yet all are different.— A few hours afterward, Tom Gilstar picked up his suit case, in the kitchen of the old house, and stood looking at his mother. "I'd rather you wouldn't come to the station, mother," he said. "I'd rather, somehow."

The little old mother smiled at her big son through her tears. "You'll stop at Antonia's," she said.

He was still a big boy, and so he blushed deeply. But he acknowledged the truth of it. "Yes, mother," he replied.

She patted him on the shoulder. "I wouldn't have it any other way, Tom," she said. "Nobody can ever

take you away from me — they can only bring you nearer to me. I am very happy. Remember your father. He will be glad. He will know. Good-by, my son.”

At the door of Antonia's home, Tom met Matt Pillicy, just coming out. The good habitant's eyes sparkled, and he threw his arms around Tom's shoulders and hugged him. “A la bonne heure, Tom!” he cried. “It is an honor to have you come. What a soldier! You are going to France? Our people they have come from France, many years ago. Of course I know nothing about it. But they are good people, Tom, and you will like them.— The little girl is inside. She will be glad to see you — and her mother, too.”

“There are twenty minutes before the train goes,” said Tom, as he entered. “I thought you might like to walk up to the station with me, 'Tony.— Yes, Mrs. Pillicy, I'm off this morning.”

“Que le bon Dieu te protège, mon fils,” said the mother, taking the big fellow's face between her hands and kissing him twice on each cheek. Then she threw her apron over her head and ran away, and left them alone.

“My soldier!” cried Antonia, reaching both hands toward him. “Oh, Tom, you are splendid. I don't know what to say. There doesn't seem to be anything to say, that counts, any more. But — you love it, now that you are going, don't you? I know you do!”

“I believe I really do, 'Tony. Yes, I do. I don't feel about it the way I used to. You remember, 'Tony, after I was made constable —”

“Oh, please don't ever mention it, Tom. It never happened, and nothing was ever said. I knew — I always knew that you were what you are. I have always thought of you as a soldier, Tom — really I have. When we were in school and you were so much

bigger than me, and I used to look at you towering above me —”

He took her in his arms, and she looked up into his face with those big, solemn, wise eyes of hers. “Tony,” he said, “no matter how long it takes, to do what we have got to do over there, it won’t seem very long afterwards, will it? And we’ll be all the happier, won’t we?”

“Yes,” she murmured.

“Sergeant Gillis says I can have a furlough after I’ve been in camp a month. A day or two perhaps. I wondered if you’d mind if we were married when I come back then. I know it doesn’t make such a great difference — we’ll be separated, but I think I can fight better, and wait better —”

“I want to be your wife, whenever you want me, Tom,” she answered. “I am all yours, all. I am so glad to belong to you, all; so glad. I will do anything you wish. I am so very happy, I cried all night. It was beautiful.”

“Then when I come back, in a month,” he said, pressing her to him.

“Yes — then. And then, Tom, I shall have something to tell you. Oh, it’s so big — such news! No; I can’t wait till then. I must tell you now. — You know, Tom, that I speak French very well, don’t you? I mean real French, not Canadian. The Sister we had, to teach us — she was from France. Did you ever know, Tom, that our name is really Pellissier? I’ll spell it for you. Nobody here could pronounce it — they wouldn’t try — so father had to spell it as they said it. Isn’t that funny? Oh, but we are Americans, Tom, no matter what our name is. Well, I speak French. And so I am going to France, where I can fight, too.”

The big fellow was so astonished that his hands

released her. "Why, you — you mustn't go over there, 'Tony!'" he cried. "I — won't allow you to."

She threw her arms around his neck and pulled him down to her. "Oh, dear, dear man!" she sobbed and laughed. "I like to have you say that! You won't allow me to! I am all yours — all yours. I am so happy! — But you'll let me go, Tom! It's such a chance to serve. I'll tell you what it is. They want telephone operators who can speak both French and English. Don't you see how useful we'll be, we girls who can run a switchboard in both languages? I said we girls will be fighting, too, Tom — and we will, won't we? though we can't fire any guns! I sent in my name a few days ago — and here's the telegram that came last night! Read it, my soldier! We are going to France together."

He read the few words on the yellow blank. "To France together!" he echoed. "Did you know — Alice is going, too?"

"Alice and I have schemed together," she answered. "We refuse to knit at home, Tom, when we are young and strong, and able to go to France with our soldiers. — You won't say I can't, will you, — my husband!"

"I must go to the station," he said, taking up his suit-case. "We must hurry, 'Tony.'"

"Yes, we must hurry," she answered, with glistening eyes. "We must hurry — to France, Tom. You and I. We are Americans, and they need us — and though we need each other, we can wait. Come, Tom! I am ready."

XVIII

ONE by one the stars come out, flicker hesitatingly, and then glow fixed and soft upon the blackened battlefields of Champagne, of Picardy, of Flanders, and before the barbed entrenchments of Toul. A few men on the alert; and the rest of the weary, muddy, war-stained men pluck moments of needed rest, and think of home, and of the ones they love, and serve.

It is a long way, and a fearful, bloody way they go, these men. Sometimes the end of the road is not very clear to us, and with aching hearts, we ask why these things should be. And sometimes we cannot find an answer, and it seems that all laughter and joy and light have gone out of the world. Yet there is ever one sustaining thing. We know that he who dies for an ideal will forever live; and that without ideals, though a man should never die, he has never truly lived. We know that there is one glorious thing, and one fulfilling thing, in life, and that is Service.

We in Tredick receive many letters from our boys in France, and the letters speak of many things, but always there is one clear, strong note in them: they are glad to be there. Always they think of home, and of us, and yet not one of them would have it otherwise than it is, until their work is done. Unflinching, strong in faith, unwearied of soul, they face the future, and bid us of Tredick to be patient, clear and strong.

These stars of France, shining on our boys, shine upon us. The same winds blow over us all, it is our mutual sun, and the ocean touches us both. We did

not know this before, or if we had known, we were forgetting. We were thinking that we lived in our little world apart. We know better now. Wherever one of our Tredick boys lies asleep in France, that little spot of ground is part of Tredick, and shall ever be. And there is not one acre of our soil in Tredick, O France, that is not yours — and yours, England, and yours, Belgium, and yours, Italy — in fee simple — to have and to hold — for the use and behoof of justice and liberty, for which all our sons and brothers and fathers and lovers, do covenant their lives.

And we know now that Khaki is no mere color and weave, but a living, precious thing. It is the symbol of Service, which is Life itself. Whosoever shall wear Khaki, in mind or on the body, cannot die, for he is wedded to that which cannot die. It is the very spirit of that selflessness which “conquers death, strips it of fear, and makes it almost beloved.”

CHESTER, MASS. April 22, 1918.

THE END

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